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BY

ESMÉ WINGFIELD-STRATFORD, D.Sc.

“Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.”—*Thomas Jefferson*.

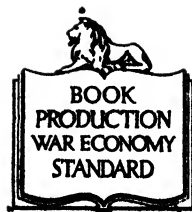
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*First published 1944*



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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	Page
PROLOGUE—WHAT IS FREEDOM?	1
I. THIS OUR HERITAGE	2
1. S.O.S.	2
2. Peril Beyond Victory	4
3. Greatheart or Littlesoul	6
4. By Guess and by God	9
5. The Vanishing Margin of Error	12
6. Human Nature Must Be Changed	16
7. The Necessary Miracle	20
8. Our Last Chance	25
II. HERITAGE OF TRUTH	28
1. People, Not Things	28
2. Truth as Destiny	31
3. The Super-Rational Imperative	34
4. What was True for our Fathers	38
5. Equilibrium Unstabilized	41
6. Does It Work?	44
7. The Valour of Knowledge	49
III. HERITAGE OF INSULARITY	52
1. The Incurable Englishman	52
2. One Island Insularity	54
3. What Hitler Might Say	58
4. Apologia pro Vita Nostra	63
5. Why We Must Become Heritage Conscious	66
IV. HERITAGE OF THOUGHT	69
1. So Long as the Heart be Right	69
2. An Englishman's Soul is his Castle	72
3. Sham-Brow	75
4. Bypassing Sense	79
5. Up-to-Date Mystery Cults	83
6. Words! Words! Words!	88
7. Through Fog to Fetters	92
V. QUISLINGS OF DISINHERITANCE	96
1. What Must We Become?	96
2. Obscene Resurrection	98
3. Left! Right!	102
4. The War within the War	109
5. Suicide Postdated	112



# PROLOGUE

## WHAT IS FREEDOM?

I DO not propose to define freedom. To define is to limit, and where limits are, freedom is not. Besides, I am not concerned with freedom in the abstract, but only with British freedom, which has conformed to no pattern, but grown up, like the British oak, solid and foursquare from its native soil into what it now is. And the end is not yet.

Thus the freedom of our order of civilization is both concrete and positive. To talk of it as mere absence of control is to misconceive its nature. For a man to be free is to be in command of his own destiny; without that mastery, he will not be long in finding a tyrant to command both it and him.

When free men freely combine to shape a common destiny, you have a free people; free peoples, thus combined, form a free commonwealth of nations. Only when all nations have sought, and found, membership in such a commonwealth, will you have the making of a free world.

The making, not the consummation. For freedom is not a thing that you can take for granted for a single day; unless it is perpetually conquered anew it is lost. Man gravitates to servitude; to freedom he must raise himself continually by his own exertions.

Such is freedom in *our* sense, the only sense that need concern us here. For its ultimate significance, we must abide the verdict of the philosophers, who have been debating the matter inconclusively for some twenty-five centuries.

This at least can be said: if there is any freedom anywhere it is consummated in God, whose service, for man, is perfect freedom.

Or alternatively there is no God, and there can be no conceivable freedom anywhere of thought, will, body, or soul; in which case Hitler stands justified, and his, or some other Hitler's, New Order is our inevitable fate. Tyranny is the political face of atheism.

## I

## THIS OUR HERITAGE

## I. S. O. S.

**A**BOUT a generation ago according to the ordinary reckoning, early in February, 1919, I happened to be functioning as second-in-command of a certain military depot located within the historic cantonment of Meerut.

In common with a good many others similarly circumstanced, I was in that state of mind, not to speak of body, for which the phrase "browed off" had yet to be invented. There was no prospect of fighting; next to no work except for the most perfunctory routine, and nothing to do except hang about wondering when, if ever, it would occur to those in authority to intimate that one's valuable services were no longer required, and that one was now free to pick up the threads of one's old life, and play at something more useful than the rather comic soldiering of our hopelessly ill-assorted unit. Moreover there was the thought of all the people at home who, because of some excellent reason or strong pull, had never even got so far as playing soldiers, and were now busy ensconcing themselves in all the fattest and snuggest post-war appointments. Worst of all, in a couple of months or so the hot season would be upon us, during which there would be no question of getting home at all; and another repetition of that, I had come to feel, was more than any poor sinner should be called upon to endure this side of eternity.

It was like one of those schoolboy thrillers in which some one is cut off by the tide, and in frantic desperation sets himself to climb the unscalable cliff, until he falls exhausted, but alive, into the smuggler's eyrie. The problem in my particular case was to find some fulcrum to lever up the vast inertia of the Powers that Be in the military administration of India. Luckily Meerut is in quite easy distance of the centre of Government at Delhi, nor with a complete holiday at least once a week, was there anything to

prevent me from conducting a second and private siege of that historic stronghold. As so often happens with siege warfare, my attempts on various minor offices were repulsed with brusqueness and contumely. But at one of them I was volunteered, not without sarcasm, the information that no power on earth was capable of demobilizing me, except one denoted by a string of letters that though meaningless to me, I fortunately remembered, and eventually tracked down to its palatial headquarters.

It was more than even I had bargained for, to be ushered into the presence of a veritable magnifico—he might have been a Field Marshal for all I knew—splendid with decorations, and quite evidently one of the most important personages in the whole of India. There was, however, nothing to do but to go through with the affair to the end—to be cashiered for intolerable impertinence would be at least one way of getting home. But I was no less surprised than relieved to find my case attended to for the first time with a sympathetic, and I fancy, rather amused courtesy until the interview was closed with:

“Good! let’s have your name, I’ll see what can be done about it.”

I never expected to hear anything more, nor did I, until, a little more than a fortnight later, a “line clear” arrived from Bombay to the effect that if I could dispose of all my worldly affairs in the space of 36 hours, accommodation would be waiting for me and my family on board a troopship. As indeed it was.

This taught me a lesson whose value I have confirmed on subsequent occasions. It is this: when you want to get anything done, never mind about the understrappers, but try to get the ear of the top man of all—the man with supreme power to do it. He is no less likely to listen to you than anybody else, and far more likely to listen effectually.

What I have to plead now is a cause far transcending in importance any individual, or even group interest. It is that for which we are now embattled and as such needs no pleading; but it is also one for which, unless we are to lose it for ever, we shall need to remain embattled longer after the winning of the present war than any man can foresee.

Freedom is its name, for freedom as we all know, is the peculiar

heritage, as it is the soul, of our British born civilization. That freedom has been, and is, in mortal peril, we need no telling. But the deadliest peril of all is yet to come, and lies beyond the victory that we now feel to be in our grasp. And by our failure to realize that, its deadliness is enhanced.

Therefore, in respect and humility, I address myself to the only person, in the last resort, capable of maintaining and safeguarding that heritage of British freedom, and not to any leader, or expert, or dignitary; since the greatest, in this kind, are but understrappers.

I appeal to you.

## 2. PERIL BEYOND VICTORY

"But", you may say, "what business is all this of mine? What can I conceivably do about it? If you want to appeal to anyone, let it, as you say yourself, be to the man of most, and not of least authority."

Which is exactly what I am doing.

For the man whom you delight to honour in the position of most authority would never have been there unless you yourself had insisted on having him; and if you had only been a little quicker off the mark, you would have insisted, to your own unspeakable advantage, long before you actually did.

Even now, but for your faith and support, he would not remain at the top for longer than it would take the little men of the baser sort, whose fingers are itching for the opportunity, to pull him down.

For the subject before us is liberty, and this is what, in a free country, is signified by liberty. The bottom dog is master, and the top dog what his title implies, Prime Minister, or chief servant of the community.

You and I obey our leaders for no other reason than would induce us to conform to the instruction of a guide whom we might have chartered for the attempt on some perilous Alpine summit. He is the man of all others in whom, on the strength of his record and of our own free judgment, we feel that we can most safely confide in a matter of life or death. The fact that we respond in-

stantaneously to, and even try to anticipate, every least indication of his will, does not affect the relationship of master and servant in the least degree, nor would any self-respecting guide so far forget his place. Certainly not the one we have got now.

But this, you may urge, is only in a way of speaking, and would signify as much, or as little, in any other country, as in one that we choose to call free. But would it? You can see for yourself that in Germany, or any other Totalitarian country, it would not fit the facts at all. There the leader frankly claims, and is admitted to be, not only in the fullest sense master, but more than any human master, even of slaves—a Lord Man God Almighty. And this notwithstanding the probability that at least up to a very recent date, an overwhelming majority of his slaves may have embraced his yoke with complacency, and even with fanaticism. For it sets the ultimate stamp on their abjection, that they are become as incapable even of the desire to be free, as if they were puppets on his wires. It is not as if the barest majority of them had opted for him, before, by force and chicanery, he got himself installed as their tyrant. But having once got them into his power he used it to condition them into wearing their fetters as if they were garlands. That, I think, will be found to be no exaggerated or distorted summary of the course of events in any Totalitarian revolution you like to name.

Freedom then, of the sort for which we are contending against the Axis, signifies a heritage in which our enemy has neither part nor lot, but which to you and me, who are its guardians and beneficiaries, ought to be more precious than life itself, since if that goes, there goes with it all hope and possibility of the only sort of life that we could bear to envisage for ourselves or our children. As go it will, unless we achieve victory to the extent of pulverizing to scrap every one of the component parts of the Axis.

That is a truth which stares all of us in the face, and of which it would be mere impertinence, at this time of day, to seek to convince anybody but a Quisling. For it is one on which all men and women of good will are very practically and enthusiastically agreed, and of which no one, in consequence, wants to be reminded.

The beating of Hitler is everybody's job, and there is no doubt



that we both can and shall put it through, however long it takes and whatever sacrifices it entails. It is not the first job of the sort to which we British have set our hands. And writing as I am at the beginning of September, 1943, it is fairly safe to add that the thickest, or, at least, the only doubtful part of this one is already behind us.

If then our heritage of freedom could be secured *by*—as admittedly it cannot be *without*—a victory over our enemies in the field, signalized by their total and unconditional surrender, there would be less than no excuse for raising the cry of freedom in danger, and appealing to you, or anybody else, to guard it well.

But that is just the vital point—it cannot be so secured. And the supreme danger to our cause, because by far the most insidious, will come not with the blitzes and the casualty lists, but with the sounding of the great All Clear. For it is then that our spirit and our steadfastness will be put to a test which, unlike that of war, our past record gives us no encouragement for believing that we can sustain.

### 3. GREATHEART OR LITTLESOUL

Here we are on ground of historic truth. Our past is on record, and that record is eloquent no less of the weakness than the strength of our national character, and of the civilization that has grown up out of it. It is a record of singular consistency, and, like a piece of old-fashioned music, consists essentially of variations on two simple and contrasting themes.

That which we might call the positive or major theme, is inspired by the belief in something peculiar to his way of thought and living, that the Englishman,—using that word in the widest sense to embrace the whole membership and communion of the British-born order of civilization—feels in his inmost soul to be a heritage and birthright dearer than life itself. If you were to press him very hard to give it a name, he would probably—in the doubtful event of his responding at all—call it freedom. And perhaps he might qualify it with the adjective “British”, or “Anglo-Saxon”. But whatever name you may give it, there is one thing that emerges from the record beyond all question or

gainsaying. Let that individual microcosm of a Commonwealth of free peoples once become apprised of danger to his birthright, and he will take his stand on that issue and not recede an inch for prudence or policy, so long as he has a drop in his veins to shed, or a penny in his pocket to give. Only when he can persuade himself that the danger has been finally removed will he consent to cry quits, and return to the peaceful existence he prefers.

If that were the only, or always the dominant theme, words would be superfluous. We could only sit quiet and listen to its unfolding. But an unprejudiced survey of the record will make it clear that for by far the greater part of the time not this, but its opposite in the minor or negative key has been the one by which the tune has been set.

The British nature, it would seem, flames into greatness as a volcano erupts, between long periods of dormancy and quiescence. It appears to need some such gross and palpable stimulus as that of overwhelming aggression to generate a common faith of sufficient driving power for victorious action.

It is not once, but time and again, that it has happened that England, having brought salvation to herself by some mighty quickening of her common will, has hastened to throw away everything she has won, and disarm in face of a peril that she may only have repelled for the moment, and so rendered more formidable than ever on the rebound.

Thus Disraeli's description of the English as a great and understanding people, surely the most magnificent compliment ever paid them, coming, as it did, from one who though *for*, was not *of* them, requires to be amended so as to be understood of what they are in very deed and proof only at certain seasons, though they have it in them to be so all the time. But for most of it, the greatness and understanding are allowed to germinate, out of evidence, somewhere below the surface of the common consciousness.

It is in those brief seasons—of which we may believe this to be one—of effective exaltation and vision, that England becomes capable of shaping the high destiny of her civilization. During such, it would be grotesque to typify the national character in the gross bellied and beef witted figure of John Bull. Nothing less

would suffice than that of Mr. Greatheart, or Mr. Valiant-for-Truth, whose name liveth for evermore.

But during the long, intervening troughs of depression, superficial or malignant observers might be more inclined to agree with those strangely popular cartoonists, who flatter the taste of their public by degrading its representative member to the image of the Little, or Lowest Man of all; the unspeakable homunculus who, we feel, could only have proliferated to his quintessence of undesirability in the domicile of a Baronial Mansion on a bypass, but whom, even in his pre-mechanized incarnation, history shows to have been always crawling about in wait to reclaim the nation from greatness to his own slime bottom level, as soon as the tension of any high endeavour has been snapped.

That is the man, and not Hitler—supposing there to be a Führer Hitler by the time these words are in print—by whom our birthright is liable to be called in question. Hitler we have got where we want him, and he knows it; but that other Little Man is less easily disposed of, since he is among us, and within us, and is what each one of us is capable of becoming the moment he ceases to think or act greatly.

And he is what, to judge from only too much of what is written and broadcast for popular consumption, a populace keyed up to greatness for Duration openly longs to see resumed as its norm on the morrow of victory. For the Little Man is a standardized product, and his motto, if he were capable of formulating it, would be "as usual". Politics as usual, business as usual, pleasure as usual, life as usual—everything back to pre-war, only rather more so to make up for arrears.

That was notoriously what, on both sides of the Atlantic, victory was taken to imply the last time it came our way. A wild, Gaderene rush back to the trough of normalcy; a universal debunking of heroism; a time for littleness, stretched out under League guarantee into sweet eternity.

And now Mr. Greatheart has had to be called up a second time to conquer back the birthright that the Little Man did his best to dissipate and barter for a mess of synthetic pottage.

Yet even now the same old come-back is being staged, as from the moment the German, or at latest the Japanese surrender,

releases the pent up craving for a long, long holiday, and a cessation from all greatness of soul and of effort in a democracy guaranteed, this time, safe and foolproof.

It is as if some obsession with the thrills of vicarious sport had induced a habit of regarding every major historic event, in which the national team spirit is aroused, as if it were not only a sort of football match, but a cup tie final—in this case really final—which is concluded for good and all by the blowing of the referee's whistle, as represented by the armistice sirens. After which the team can disband and go out of training, in the sure knowledge that the cup will repose for ever after unchallenged on the Club sideboard, without even the need for insuring it.

Which would be bad enough, even if it were not for the additional fallacy of mistaking the half for the full time signal.

#### 4. BY GUESS AND BY GOD

Those of us—and I confess myself to be one—in whom the image and idea of our compatriot Little Man awaken feelings of hardly less repulsion than those of Hitler himself, must take particular care not to let these feelings overbear their judgment. It does not follow that even the nastiest things may not have their necessary uses, or that the tree of British liberty may not require periodical dressings of such human manure.

For there *is* a case for the Little Man, and for his recurrent dominance of the nation's affairs, which is far stronger than by his low nature he is capable of putting for himself, and it is only when we have appreciated to the full in what the strength of that case consists, that we shall be able to lay a finger on what is its real and decisive weakness.

Let us put it as it was first put by one of the later Pharaohs: "Those who have bows draw them tight when they want to use them, and unbend them when they do not".

The same thing, it may be argued, applies to nations. They cannot remain on the stretch from one century's end to another. There is a time for greatness; but if you try to be great all the time you will exhaust your capacity for it. The perpetual stimulus of Mr. Greatheart's leadership would be too much of a good thing

for workaday mortals. Wait till the Armada has left port, or until the Luftwaffe has got the French airfields, and then draw the bow tight and shoot like Jove's thunderbolt.

Afterwards, when the enemy is lying transfixed, the bow can be unstrung, Mr. Greatheart retired on a peerage or a pension, and then up the Little Man! and hey for the crooning time of things as usual, and the agreeable routine of the sort of business and pleasure and politics that a man can enjoy with the minimum of creative effort or concentration!

Such, after all, is the way of nature, whose advance is never continuous, but proceeds like that of an attacking army, by sudden bounds forward, followed by pauses to consolidate the ground gained, and who alternates seasons of activity with those of sleep. It is the way of the mind, which needs time for the sub-conscious digestion of every conscious increment, and is only impoverished by continuous cramming. Above all, it may be urged, it is the way that has worked with us—a way more emphatically suited to the English than any other nature, since we, to a peculiar degree, are governed by tendencies that operate beneath the surface, and are seldom able to formulate, even to ourselves, our innermost reasons for striking out any new line of our own.

There is no such thing, in British history, as continuous, deliberate progress; nothing like the cold unswerving concentration on certain defined ends that has been—at its best—the mark of Latin statesmanship.

It might be said that progress with Britain has largely consisted in getting things that she did not bargain for, and then taking no special trouble to preserve when she has got them. If she has had a divine faculty of throwing up great men on occasions of greatest urgency, she has more often than not abandoned the fruits of their greatness to be marred or dissipated by the little men.

And this, though it has happened in nearly every war she has ever fought, holds good in a far wider than the military sense. If her growth into a commonwealth of free peoples ever finds its historian—and such a one would need to command more than the combined resources of a Macaulay and a Gibbon—his record

might at first sight read like one of chronic disappointment. Reaction has dogged progress as surely as night has followed day. What have passed into popular legend as veritable triumphs and landmarks of freedom, are revealed to have been turned, in the event, to the exact opposite of their ostensible purpose. The Glorious Revolution, for example, makes the country safe for plutocracy, and paves the way for the enclosure of the commons; the Great Reform Bill has its firstfruits in the inhuman Poor Law of 1834, with results that everyone may study for himself in the pages of *Oliver Twist*. Always when the great man seems to have scored some decisive advantage for freedom, the little man is on his heels to cancel it out, or to chalk it up to his own score.

And yet, in spite of him, and in spite of everything, the plant of British liberty has gone on growing, like an oak which every autumn is stripped bare of its leafage but adds one unperceived ring to its trunk, until from a sapling it becomes the patriarch of its own forest.

There you have a case that a competent advocate might put for demobilization in the fullest sense, when the task in hand, that of beating the Axis, is done. To expect to be keyed up to greatness all the time, war and post-war, would, he would urge, be flying in the face not only of nature, but of experience.

Even if freedom is our birthright, we cannot be perpetually on the *qui vive* about it. We never have in the past, and to talk of doing so in the future is to display the moral neurosis of one of Dean Farrar's school stories. The tighter the bow is drawn now, the more urgent will be the need for unbending it afterwards. There is no call to get excited about the customary amount of backsliding; progress has its own pace, and it is no good trying to force it. The easier we take life on ordinary occasions, the greater the reserves of strength we shall build up against the time when the next extraordinary call comes, for ourselves or our children. That is our British way—call it muddling through or what you like; but the fact that we have followed it unashamedly in the past, and that it has brought us where we are, proves that, with all its faults, it is the right way, and that we may safely trust ourselves to it in the future.

Such is the case to go before the democratic jury for what will

need no advocacy, once the demand for blood and tears, toil and sweat, is no longer obvious. And the argument is so strong, and seems so logically watertight, that it is hardly possible to set it down oneself without being half convinced by it.

It is only when one examines it very closely that one comes to see in what the fallacy consists. For a fallacy there is, and it lurks in the final assumption, that a way of life that has held good in the past must hold equally good in the present, and for as much of the future as is likely to be any business of ours.

Which, if you consider it, you will find to repose upon another assumption: that the same sort of conditions that have held good in the past, prevail now, and will continue to do so. Not of course down to the last detail, but to the sufficient extent that for practical purposes they have held good for all previous generations, so long as there has been an England.

But how if, in the course of half a dozen generations, the conditions have been so completely revolutionized, that the beaten way of the past, like a cliff edge path after a landslide, has become a death trap?

## 5. THE VANISHING MARGIN OF ERROR

That space of half a dozen generations does not seem immeasurably wide to those of us who, having themselves become grandfathers, retain a vivid recollection of the grand old Victorian contemporaries, in youth, of their great-great-grandparents, and who thus have first or second hand evidence embracing all six. But though such recollection has the effect of making the time itself seem quite imaginably short, it has also that of making the change accomplished therein seem so preternaturally vast as to resemble that signified by successive strata in geology.

One has talked to old gentlemen who could remember the time when a railway train was an alarming and obscene phenomenon, fortunately confined to the ungentle neighbourhood of the Mersey; when Bobby Peel's new police constituted an even more recent innovation, and one hardly less disturbing to old-fashioned people; when the journey from London to Llandudno—as I remember one stately old lady telling me of her girlhood—was

accomplished in the grand style in three days, by the family coach, barouche, or whatever its lordly name may have been; and when what is now the Commonwealth consisted of "the Colonies", a convenient dumping ground for crooks and family black-sheep, but distant a matter of months from home and civilization, and, on the whole, regarded as less of an asset than a liability, to be liquidated as soon as decently practicable.

In short, a time when mechanization, though under way, had hardly begun to quicken the pace of life, except in those localities where the new industrial dormitories had begun to suppurate over the landscape like a plague rash. And the grandfathers whom those grandfathers could remember, might have told of an age when life still proceeded at a pace hardly perceptibly quickened since the Renaissance, and very markedly slowed down from that of imperial Rome, or Alexandria under the Ptolemies—a pace represented by that of a springless coach ploughing a river of mud that no Roman would have honoured with the name of *via*. But in the span of those last six generations an utterly new sort of world has come into existence—a world of incomparably greater possibilities than any of which that communal memory that we call history has to notify us. Greater possibilities—and this is the point to note—either way, good or bad.

Above all, a new world requiring a new sort of human being, sufficiently keyed up to its requirements to live up to it—or to live at all.

To argue therefore that the sort of hit and miss method of progress that served our fathers from the dawn of history will be equally good for us, may constitute a fatal delusion. Let me put it this way: in any sort of progress there is always a certain margin of error, a certain allowance of blunders that can be made and chances that can be missed without any irretrievably disastrous consequences. But there is a law as inexorable as those of mechanics, to the effect that with every speeding up of the pace of life, this margin is reduced, until with the enormous acceleration that comes with a mechanized environment, it begins to approach vanishing point.

There is no room for hit and miss with high powered machinery. You have got to plan and to execute with the minutest



accuracy all the time, in the knowledge that your first mistake is likely to be your last.

There used to be an American proverb: "Never monkey with a buzz saw"—a proposition that most people will be content to take for granted without experiment. But there are, no doubt, all sorts of ways in which one could monkey with a hand saw, especially if it were the honest but not unduly keen product of the local blacksmith.

Again, readers of de Quincey will remember how it was possible for the mail coach to go thundering through the night along the King's highway with the ribbons clutched in the hand of a driver fast asleep. But let any driver of a high-powered car along the same road indulge in even the shortest nap with his foot on the throttle! And if he should be subsequently put together sufficiently to stand his trial for manslaughter, he would hardly impress the court in his favour by remarking:

"Well, I thought what was good enough for one of those old boys would be good enough for me!"

That coachman, admittedly, might have had more to advance in defence of his conduct, than he would have judged prudent under the circumstances. For provided that the margin of permissible error is wide enough to allow of it, there is something to be said for an overtaken driver making up for arrears of sleep on his box, and allowing the horses to race blindly ahead through the night by the light of instinct towards their stables at the next posting stage. For they are high mettled and intelligent animals. And when the occasion comes—as come it will on such a road—for a piece of really difficult driving, the man will be in all the better fettle for having kept his energies dormant and refreshed for the crisis, until he is aroused into action by the crash of an encounter with some lesser vehicle, or the bullet of a highwayman grazing his cheek. The proof of the pudding lies in the fact that the old coach, in spite of being bogged in the mud times without number and sustaining every sort of collision and mishap, has not only survived, but made what many think to be the most successful journey of any recorded up to date, with the driver fitter than ever for the next stage.

How that analogy serves for the case of a pre-mechanized

England will be obvious to everyone. She may have been wiser than she knew to keep her best energies in reserve until roused by some mortal crisis, and muddle along by guess and by God, in between times. Up to a point—the point of mechanization.

But beyond that analogy fails us, unless we can dream ourselves in a world where it is possible for this same driver to be transferred at the posting house to a super-powered motor coach, to find his next point over some complicated and congested network of speedways. Which is no dream at all, when translated into the terms of our own situation, but the stark, if not the sober reality, to which we, who collectively constitute the driver, have got to adapt ourselves, here and now, or perish. For therein lies the mortal danger of the new age. The date for hit and miss, for inspired muddle through, is out. We have no longer the old margin of error that made it safe for us to go ahead by instinct and profit by our own mistakes, or that allowed us to keep our best energies in reserve, and hibernate mentally between crises. For it is even more nearly true to say that the machine gives no second chance, and concedes no more than a microscopic margin of error. If it were quite true, it would be good for nothing but our epitaph.

What brighter chance was ever offered of saving and safeguarding our civilization than after the last war? A chance that we flung back in the face of Providence when, in accordance with our own immemorial precedent, we hastened to disarm literally and spiritually; and after a joyous surfeit of as many as we could recover of our pre-war vomits, composed our souls to sleep—as Blake would have put it in that weirdly expressive code language of his prophetic books—in Ulro. And it is no thanks to us, but to Heaven or Hitler, if, as seems likely in the sequel of the present war, a second chance does come our way—tenuous, perhaps, and doubtful, but still, a chance, and as such more than we had the least right to expect. For, in so far as we can talk of an “ought” in such matters, our refusal of the previous one *ought* to have settled our business for good and all. Beyond any doubt in the world, we had let things slide so far, by the summer of 1940, that Hitler and his partners in the Axis had only to have made the obvious moves, or even to have refrained from making even more

obvious blunders, to have had us—in their own elegant language—*kaput*, in spite of all that blood, tears, toil, sweat, and Churchill, could have done to save us. Never was truer word spoken than that of the old English proverb—*The devil is an ass*. But as represented by this disciple in chief, how super-asinine an ass! And how unfailling!

Who but Adolf Hitler could have called off the gamble of invasion when it would have been gambling on a practical certainty? Who but he could have conquered Stalin's fixed resolve to keep Russia out of the fray? And what even in the last war had been the crowning disaster of American intervention, that Roosevelt himself could not, even if he would, have brought for the second time on Germany, was left for Mein Führer, through the agency of Japan, to precipitate. What, compared with ours, is his own country's debt to Kaiser Adolf? Never have so many owed so much to one man!

But not Hitler and Churchill combined, not any God in whom experience gives us the remotest warrant for believing, can or will conceivably vouchsafe us a third chance of recovery, if we throw away the second after the first. For mechanization is a cumulative and accelerating process, and we are already aeons away, by pre-mechanized standards, from where we were in 1914; perhaps a century or two from 1939. And with every advance the margin of error is compressed as if by a machine-powered vice, and the last loopholes sealed of possible escape from the Nemesis of our own errors.

Not even the gods, it has been said, are as strong as fate, and fate is what men make for themselves. And now the time has come for making and mastering it, not blindly by intuition, but with full consciousness and foreknowledge; not by occasionally arousing ourselves to some mighty outburst of energy, but with our creative faculties awake and in action all the time.

## 6. HUMAN NATURE MUST BE CHANGED

Suppose you were to burst into some man's office with an alarm of fire, and he were to answer:

"Thank you—what you say is very likely true. But if you

will kindly excuse me I am exceptionally busy this morning—I am sure you will understand—and do mind the step as you go out."

"But for God's sake . . ." you may say, "don't you understand you are going to be burnt alive if you stop here? Come to the head of the stairs, if you don't believe me, and see the smoke coming up. It may be too late in another minute."

"Yes, I know; but there's no need to get excited about it. The matter shall have my attention in due course. And now—you really must excuse me!"

Which I think fairly represents the experience of those who, instead of coming forward with some patent plan or—as the fashionable word now is—blue print, dare to maintain that the best of such remedies can only touch the surface of the real trouble, which is rooted in the profoundest depths of human nature—yours and mine and everyman's; and that unless we can get that nature reformed from the bottom up, and adapted to the specific requirements of a machine-powered environment, there is nothing that any leader or plan or authority can conceivably do to save us from imminent, and almost certainly final, catastrophe. Which might appear to be about as serious a proposition as any that could conceivably be advanced, though admittedly a heavy burden of proof rests on him who advances it. But such proof is only too easily forthcoming from almost any angle you like to adopt; for there is no law of nature subject to less doubt or exception than that which decrees that every change of environment must be met by a proportionate change in the creature, or the creature perishes. Nor has any change in any creature's environment since the dawn of life been so revolutionary as that which man, in six brief generations, has effected in his own. He must therefore effect an answering change in himself or perish utterly. In this plain and obvious reasoning nobody has ever, to my knowledge, even professed to detect the slightest flaw. Nor would it seem possible for anybody capable of consecutive thought to evade the conclusion. If he does not trust his brain, let him use his eyes, and judge for himself whether all is not working out accurately to expectation.

Destructive forces are being let loose on civilization of a might

and virulence never dreamed of in the past. The avalanche is not a matter of speculation, it is well under way. But for a miracle, we should be lying buried beneath it even now. And yet it is a fact that anyone can test for himself, that though almost any crazy plan or nostrum on the accustomed lines only needs a competent publicity agent to set fanatics swarming for it as thick as maggots in a dead rat, the least suggestion that the trouble lies not outside, but within us, can hope for no more favourable response than is conveyed in that very expressive Americanism—"Oh yeah!"

There speaks the voice of the old, pre-mechanized Adam. And we must allow that such an attitude, however baffling, is at least human in so far as it is rooted in a characteristically modern scepticism about any sort of appeal that can be classed under the designation of moral uplift. For the common man has been subjected to this sort of barrage ever since he can remember, and though the noise is frequently deafening, long experience of its effects has convinced him that the ammunition is blank. Periodical revival stunts, ranging from the wildest extremes of Transatlantic ballyhoo, to moral rearmament sponsored by Archbishops in a forlorn hope of warming derelict pews, may no doubt compete with the cinema in providing an occasional mild stimulus for minds capable of receiving it, but to an increasing majority the very idea of such exercises is as boring as it is futile.

Add to this a peculiarly modern belief that if you can only get your machinery right, the men will take care of themselves. He who would start reform with the inner man is, in that view, like a gardener who should try to grow plants from the blossom downwards. For the meat is more than the life; since as any faithful disciple can tell who has read about his Marx (I do not say *read* him—since there are limits even to faith), you have only got to get right with Mammon, and your relations with whatever may be the up-to-date substitute for God will adjust themselves automatically. The machine is what makes the meat. And science is what makes the machine. Science does things. Science delivers the goods. Possess the machinery and all will go like clockwork—yourself included. Yourself most of all.

Which is a very comforting doctrine for those who can see no

particular objection to reducing themselves to clockwork, and sacrificing their birthright of human freedom for a dream of automatic efficiency. But unfortunately it is not only sub-human, but wholly impracticable and unscientific, involving, as it does in the crudest form, the fallacy of perpetual motion, or of the machine that runs itself. Whereas the most efficient machinery, once it gets out of human control, will run itself to one of two things—a dead stop or a general smash.

So the modern faith in a self-guaranteed progress through mechanization is a plain case of putting the cart before the horse; or, shall we say, expecting the car to control the chauffeur.

The machinery is a product, and, as a mathematician would put it, a function of human nature. And the more complicated your machinery, the more exacting become the demands on that nature. The mental level safe for the driving of a farm cart has got to be raised incomparably higher for the successful manœuvring of a Typhoon. Those who go on repeating the old tag that human nature cannot be changed, are only fit to be certified as suicidal. Modern man cannot have it both ways; progress will not march with stagnation. Every fresh advance in mechanization is a demand for the raising of human nature to a higher plane, and the penalty for non-compliance is capital. Or to put it in its most up-to-date form—Total.

For what is the Totalitarian phenomenon but the inevitable nemesis of arming the Little Man with machinery that he is not man enough, and therefore not free, to control?

Thus it all comes down to freedom. It is freedom that we are fighting for, but not only, or in the first place, against Hitler, or the Axis. That conquest must first be made in ourselves. Men who are fit to be free are forearmed against tyranny; those who are not are foredoomed to slavery. And from Total slavery to total extinction the road is straight, and may not be long.

So the familiar phrase takes on a new significance:

“We *must* be free or die.”

## 7. THE NECESSARY MIRACLE

I am afraid there may be those who, if they have had the patience to accompany me thus far, will be inclined to ask what all this about human nature and civilization has got to do with the subject of the British heritage that we are fighting to preserve.

I can only reply that until we can see in its true perspective the whole crisis of modern civilization, of which this war is only one symptom, we shall never be in a position to understand the part that the British Commonwealth or—what is fundamental—you and I, its individual members, are called upon to play in it.

For who can even begin to understand his part, without any conception of the drama in which it is to be performed, or if he should imagine that it is the same good old piece whose long run recently came to an end? For this drama is not only completely new, but the most stupendous ever staged—that of a world revolution which, for all anyone in the audience is able to tell, may be working up to its tragic culmination with the curtain falling on the end of the world.

The danger of setting down this in cold print is lest it should be imagined that so horrific a prospect is a figment of sheer rhetoric. I should be only too glad if anyone could drive this charge home. But the crisis to which I am referring is the most precise and definite of which it is possible to conceive, because it is the direct effect of the revolution brought about by uncontrolled mechanization. And whatever other charges may be laid at the door of the machine, that of vagueness is ruled out. Every step forward registers an increase in precision.

And though it may be less obvious, the very definiteness of this revolution in the outer world forces us to be proportionately definite in calling for a mental and spiritual revolution to match it. The time for mere uplift and exhortation is past, if for no other reason than that such appeals are invariably, if one comes to examine them, found to be adapted to the conditions of a former, and comparatively static environment. "Be good sweet sir, or madam, and let who will be clever," is their practically

invariable theme, the elements of goodness being understood to fluctuate narrowly within the limits of adaptation to an average existence, in an environment relatively stable for centuries past and, frequently, to come.

As if moral rearmament were such a simple thing that one had only to follow the lead of seventeenth century divines or the Fathers of the Church, and (discarding whatever may be unfashionable of the specifically dogmatic element) get down to the job of turning out the whole armour of the Eternal with breast-plate, sword and shield standardized to the most advanced legionary pattern of the time of Nero! <sup>1</sup>

That what would be scouted as antideluvian absurdity in the physical sphere is accepted as a matter of course in that of the spirit, is due mainly to the fact that modern man has come to look on the material aspect as the only one fit to be taken seriously.

We are practical about the things we value; we spare no pains to keep our machinery, or our investments, up to date—how practical we are about our physical rearmament nobody between 18 and 50 will need to be reminded. But spiritual rearmament, to which much less serious thought is devoted than the science of reducing one's handicap on the links, is the sort of thing that the average man is content to leave, with sincere respect, to the like of Bishops and Buchmanites, of whom no reasonable man would dream of expecting more than the sort of mild emotional stimulus that good John Wesley accounted for sin in the orgies of tea drinkers. And not always that.

Now it cannot be too clearly realized that the sort of mental and spiritual revolution that is called for in the present crisis of civilization, has no more in common with what in India they would call a padre's *bandabast*, than the Christianity of its Founder had with a priest's *bandabast*—still less with the output of ethical societies and the sort of jolly-good-fellow-all-roundness that is a safe lead for a B.B.C. postscript. For the whole idea is to

<sup>1</sup> I have never forgotten how on the first of the compulsory church parades that I had to attend in India, the preacher caused a mild sensation by remarking "And of course you men will know that a soldier's chief weapon is his shield." That seemed a little out of date, even by the standards of Simla in 1914!



bring the inner man up to the requirements of the new age, with a spiritual equipment as much up to date as the latest gadget on the newest aeroplane engine, lest instead of being the master of his machinery he should become part of it, a de-souled Robot.

But merely to state this in the abstract is not going to get us much further. It might even be objected that it is merely to change one sort of uplift for another. It is the easiest thing in the world to tell a man to provide himself with an up-to-date soul, but quite another to give him a working notion of what such a soul would be like, or how he is to set about getting it. He may well ask by what conceivable means anyone in his senses can imagine that not only he himself, but everybody else, is going to be wrought upon to effect the required transformation in anything like the required time. Men into supermen! And men such as one may rub shoulders with in the tube and play darts with in the pub, men in the ranks, or behind the counter, or at the pitface, or on the beach at Blackpool; men who, if you could put the case ever so convincingly, would neither read what you wrote nor listen to what you said—the vast, inert, mass of average men and women.

But there is no need—so far as Britain is concerned, to go beyond experience. Such a transformation, such a quickening of the mass to greatness, not only could, but did take place in the eyes of the whole world. When nothing less than a miracle was needed to save her, and through her, civilization, she rose to the occasion and, in the teeth of practically universal expectation, brought it off. Nothing more, if nothing less, will be needed to make the world safe for civilization after the war. It is not a question of finding greatness equal to the need; it is simply one of maintaining it as long as the need lasts. Which itself is a large enough order, but surely not unthinkable so.

For here we have the task of saving ourselves and the world brought down from the regions of wishful exhortation to the sphere of the definite and practicable. We are not turned loose, as it were, into the void, and given the choice of sprouting angel wings or falling into the bottomless pit. We are not presented with some portrait of an ideal man in Utopia, to which we are all expected to conform in the twinkling of an eye. That is not the

idea at all, and if it were, there would be no more to be said or done about it. For, as every sensible man knows, that sort of miracle does not happen, except in dreams. For it is only in dream architecture that castles emanate from the void. The worker of solid miracles wants something tangible to build upon, even if it is no more than five barley loaves and a few small fishes, or a handful of Spitfires and Hurricanes, with a few stout lads to pilot them.

He who first hit on the name of the Battle of Britain can hardly have suspected how profoundly appropriate the phrase was. It was the Battle of Britain in the sense that it had taken the whole growth and development of the British soul, from a time long before there was any such thing as a British nation, to make it possible.

Take it? Of course we could, as we have time and again since we took it with Alfred of Wessex from an opponent quite as formidable, and a great deal more Nordic, than Hitler.

The Teutonic Thor, according to the legend, once characteristically started a blitz with his hammer on the head of a giant whom he found peacefully asleep. In the morning, after having failed to achieve any noticeable results, he discovered that what he had taken for a giant was in fact the solid earth, on whose crust he had been beating this hopeful tattoo. The Germans must have felt rather like that in the Autumn of 1940.

From this gross and obvious peril Britain wrought the miracle of her own salvation, in spite of her shameful unpreparedness with the weapons of material defence, for no other reason than that she was able to build her edifice of victory upon the foundation of her own past. She was in the position of an heir who, called upon to settle some demand far in excess of his current balance at the bank, is able to cash in upon the accumulated savings of his ancestors.

But looked at in this light, it ceases to merit the name of miracle. It would have been a miracle if, given these conditions, any other result had been registered. Despite all the material odds in their favour—and the more we learn about them the more staggeringly disproportionate they prove to have been—the Luftwaffe and the Wehrmacht stood just as little chance as

the mythical tallow dog chasing the asbestos cat in Hell. It demanded no revolution of the spirit; merely that England should rest true to her evolving, but constant, self. As at Waterloo, the enemy came on in the old way, and was beaten in the old way. That was all.

But what we shall need once this crisis is past is a miracle in the true sense; or at any rate, something for which the past offers no precedent and which implies not a reversion to, but a reversal of, our ancient form. And yet the distinction in principle between what we have done to win the war, and what we shall have to do to win the peace, is not so easy, at the first glance, to perceive. For we shall still be required to build, and to draw, upon our past. What, in effect, we did in the hour of supreme crisis, was to mobilize our spiritual reserves. What we have to do, and the best that we *can* do in the aftermath of victory, is to keep them mobilized—to respond as greatly to the innumerable calls that will be made on us in building and safeguarding a new world, as we did when our old world seemed to be collapsing in ruin about us.

To anyone who keeps in mind that perpetual alternation, through the whole of our past history, of brief flashes of greatness with long stretches of apathy, it will surely be plain that the fulfilment of so unprecedented a demand upon human, and particularly on British nature, as that of keeping the bow stretched after the shaft has transfixed the ostensible enemy, in itself constitutes a revolution, so drastic that there are many, who once they grasp all that it implies, will cry out in horror against the bare idea of attempting it. It is a staggering proposition—let there be no doubt about it. For here we cannot feel, to the same extent as we did during the Battle of Britain, that we have the past on our side, and that the demand on us is merely that we should recollect our true selves and recover the form that has never failed us in the hour of supreme crisis. For our immemorial way has been to finish the job in hand and then give ourselves a long holiday. Never has it been to keep on the stretch after the immediate tension has been relaxed; to remain mobilized, in any sense of the word, after the victory.

Everywhere it is understood, and being dinned through all

the megaphones of publicity into only too willing ears, that any sacrifices beyond the normal that may be exacted of us are strictly limited by "Duration". And notoriously there are cases where Duration has been judged a great deal too long to wait.

But there is a hope—though pessimists may reckon it forlorn enough, that in a sense, we may still have our past to fall back upon, and that we have, through all these generations, grown up to the measure of this, as we did to that of every lesser crisis. For it might be said of the common Englishman, as it was of his most uncommon, but not unrepresentative compatriot, Sir John Falstaff,<sup>1</sup> that he will fight no longer than he sees reason. But it is equally true that so long as he does see reason he will stick it out, in the spirit of John Sayers, the bruiser, who when his right arm had been broken by the giant Heenan, went on pounding with his left, for round after round, until at last he had evened the score by fairly closing up both his opponent's eyes.

As long as he sees reason your Englishman, taken collectively, will die rather than quit. He has proved it again and again—no fight will be too long and no job too thick for him. But the trouble is to make him see reason in time. And it has hitherto been a sheer impossibility to make him go on seeing it after a time fixed by himself as that of the All Clear. Fixed, almost without exception, in advance of the real fact.

## 8. OUR LAST CHANCE

There are no words in our language more hauntingly poignant than those which Shakespeare has put into the mouth of his Mark Antony:

"Unarm Eros, the long day's task is done,  
And we must sleep."

It is a sigh that has welled up, less articulately, sooner or later from the heart of Britain herself in the course of every long day's task, and more often than not with the task less than half done.

<sup>1</sup> Jack Falstaff, as I should like to remind those who have never seen him presented in any other light than that of a comic old coward, led in person his 150 ragamuffins at Shrewsbury till, by his own estimate, they were reduced to less than 3. Some coward!

But up to the present time Britain, unlike Antony, has escaped any worse consequences than that of having to begin the task all over again from the beginning, and incur far heavier sacrifices than if she had resisted the approaches of sleep until she had finished it off well and truly at one stretch. Every time she has cut the margin of safety finer and finer. This last time she cut it so fine that by all rational calculation she had passed the point beyond which her opponent had only got to play his hand out, in order to sweep the board. For it is romantic illusion to believe that even the human spirit, at its greatest, can prevail against more than a certain excess or brute, or mechanical, violence.

But if, as appears probable, that excess was at one time at Hitler's command, he lacked the nerve or the skill to make it decisive, and the chance of recovery thus presented to Britain was not let slip.

But it is such a chance as will never come our way again. Of that, so far as certainty can be predicted of anything in this human world, there can be no doubt whatever. For it is the nature of mechanical progress to eliminate chances. The time for hit and miss, for unarming in face of the enemy, and for going to sleep at the controls, is past. As the margin of error shrinks, so does the need become imperative for every task to be carried through exactly to plan and to time, according to our enemy's proverb, "without haste and without rest".

And this applies not only to the activity of war, which, under the conditions of the new age, it is imperative to eliminate unconditionally and for ever, but to all the manifold problems incidental to establishing and maintaining the new order of free civilization that it will be our task to substitute for that of a one-man-controlled mechanocracy.

To revert to the muddle and anarchy of the sort of society for which we made the world safe after the last war, is to make the world sure, after a much shorter interval than before, of Total war or Total revolution, or both combined, culminating in Total ruin.

And Total will mean, what the name implies—final.

For unless we can put in a new man fit to be the master and not the slave of his machinery, nothing can stop the progress of

mechanization from sweeping on to its total conclusion of mechanizing the man. And under that order of things we shall cease to survive at all except in the communion and fellowship of machine parts, or to differ from cogs and nuts except as these differ from one another in the formula of their composition and the function for which each happens to be specialized.

That is the cure that the Total practitioners have to prescribe for what they have pronounced to be the otherwise incurable case of modern civilization. And as a first step they propose to anæsthetize the patient for long enough to cut whatever may be left of a soul out of the system. And they point out that all other cures and physicians having failed to arrest the malady, there is nothing for it but to give them a free hand with the knife.

The offer is plausible—so plausible as to have been accepted with starved avidity by one European people after another. We shall not prove it wrong by ourselves refusing to be strapped to the table, or by exposing the would-be operator as a quack, or even by lynching him out of hand. It will not prove the operation to have been unnecessary; and indeed a second and worse collapse after accomplishing these desirable ends will reproduce the situation in a worse form than before, and consign us to the mercy of some even less compromising charlatan to kill, or worse than kill.

The question that dominates every other is whether we can preserve our souls alive and free within the body of a mechanized environment. Whether in fact we are men enough to go on being human.

To that we ourselves must be, and do, the answer—for other answer there can be none.

## II

## HERITAGE OF TRUTH

## I. PEOPLE, NOT THINGS

THE least acquaintance with history, beyond that which may be derived from academic or journalese sources, should be enough to make it clear that nations and peoples cannot be treated in the light of so much clay, to be moulded into any desirable shape according to choice. For the more deeply you examine the actual facts, the more surely it will be borne in upon you that no human community has ever become anything that it did not grow up into. Even revolutions are only the release of pent up forces that have been gathering beneath the surface for centuries or even millenia.

For the great collective Leviathans or States, those super-human personalities that are to the individuals who compose and renew them, as is the body of each of these individuals to its component cells, are the products of growth; and though, within due limits, you may force or even control growth, you cannot ever force it to conform to any pattern but its own.

God Himself has never, to my knowledge, been alleged to have corrected a fruit shortage by turning oak apples into Ribstons.

Stated in this form it appears an almost insulting platitude to thrust under any educated reader's nose. And yet half the misery of the world comes from the fact that human beings are perpetually attempting to work on each other, and on themselves in the mass, this insane alchemy that no country bumpkin would be simple enough to try upon a cabbage.

How many wrecked marriages, and estrangements between parents and children, have not sprung from a flat refusal to admit that this He, and that She, are their own proper selves, and that all the king's horses and all the king's men will never make any of them into anything different, except in so far as it is possible

to stunt or kill them—transformations only too easily wrought upon growing things.

But there are fortunately a few people who are capable of realizing, in their calm moments, that you have got to accept your fellow man as you find him, and that you are only asking for trouble if you seek to transmute him into your own image or ideal. But in dealing with the affairs of nations, to judge by the vast output of current writing on the subject, there is rarely anyone who displays even a glimmering of this consciousness.

Peoples, nations, and those larger groupings that we refer to as civilizations, are treated of as if they were pure homogeneous units that could be combined and arranged in any way without regard to their pasts, or individual differences. And in consequence they can be, and are, fitted into patterns arranged according to more or less definitely conceived abstract or ideological notions that are the same for Nation A. as for Nation B.

There is a class of standardized and self-conscious intellectuals, who appear to pride themselves on nothing more than the completeness with which they have purged their minds of any sort of reality that could, in any way, be branded with the stigma of their own, or anybody else's, patriotism. The idea, for instance, that the British Commonwealth of Nations stands for something in this world crisis of unique and unprecedented significance, a way of civilization different in kind from that of its opponents and all but one of its allies, and one that it may be as important to preserve as it is to destroy the menace of its Totalitarian opposite, is blocked by the same red light that used, before the blitz, to guard the approaches to Bloomsbury.

Only a day or two ago I happened to be reading an averagely favourable specimen of that numerous class of treatises, in which the author tries his hand at formulating the terms of a peace that shall really bring off what the one at Versailles so signally failed to do. According to this prescription, the unwieldiness of a world league of nations is to be avoided by setting up four—I think it was—federations of states, arranged according to geographical convenience, and keeping the peace not only within their own areas, but also with each other. By what exact means this is to be fixed up need not concern us; what is significant is the touch-



ing assurance with which the obviously public-spirited writer collects his nations and ties them neatly into bundles, without ever bothering to notice that he has casually dissolved and re-distributed the whole British Commonwealth and so-called Empire without so much as a "By 'your leave". The British Isles are just lumped in with Europe (minus Russia), Canada in a similar way being mingled with such strange co-ingredients as Mexico and Nicaragua in the American hotch potch—though the author admits himself to be a little puzzled about Australia and New Zealand, whether they would be more conveniently roped into Asia (minus Russia) or America. But these little details could no doubt be adjusted at the Peace Conference.

This sort of exercise may be as agreeable a way of de-boring the journey home from the city as is the scrawling of pencil marks in crossword squares, but to claim a superior value for it, on the ground that it gets your mind working on these vital problems, would be going too far. For if your thought is vitiated at the source, you are merely bogging your mind in the pursuit of will-o'-the-wisps.

You may reply that you chase will-o'-the-wisps for the same harmless reason as your dog chases birds, and that it is better, anyhow, to be muddled than bored. But the sum total of these muddles may be reckoned for suicide, when it works out to such a culmination of absurdity as the late lamented Geneva League, with its wonderful polyglot membership, and apparatus of paper sanctions impressive enough to convince a more or less British intelligensia that it was safe to deprive the country of the brute force to defend itself, in consideration of such support as might be guaranteed by the Republic of Switzerland, the Empire of the Negus, the Kingdom of Thailand, old Uncle Benito and all!

We have seen—or perhaps it would be more correct to say we have got—the results of this habit of thought that divorces nations from their pasts and, with some vague notion of clearing itself of prejudice, transports us from the world of life and growth to one of soulless abstractions that are, literally, like nothing on earth, except parts of a mechanical contrivance.

Which, as you may perhaps recall, is the Totalitarian idea of a perfect world order.

## 2. TRUTH AS DESTINY

It has long seemed to me—and I hope I may be pardoned for repeating it here—that the tragedy of the modern age may best be comprehended as the unfolding of one theme, signified in its prologue: that prologue being the ancient and profound myth of the Sphinx's riddle. The Sphinx, you will remember, was the monster who used to give her victims the choice between giving the correct answer to a certain question—significantly enough concerning the nature of man—or perishing. But I cannot help thinking that the story as it has come down to us lends itself to a certain misunderstanding. For we are apt to think of the Œdipus, or whatever the happy solver may be called, as having improvised the answer on the spot by sheer native wit and intuition. It is not like that really. We ought to think of the Sphinx not as a poser of casual conundrums, but rather in the light of a sublimated examiner. And one does not floor examination papers by sheer native wit and nothing else. The correct answer to all the questions may easily be committed to paper in an hour or two, provided that one has it at one's finger ends. But it may take more than as many years' intensive preparation to get to know it to that extent.

Now we happen to be up for positively our final chance of passing the supreme test, and we find ourselves confronted with that most ancient question of all—"What shall we do to be saved?" And it is a question to which we have not one chance in a million of thinking up the answer on the spur of the moment and—as it were—out of the blue print. The only sort of answer that will pass muster or avail us at all, will have to be one that we have built up already within ourselves through generation after generation of evolving selfhood.

We may dream of the day, that none of us can hope to see with his own eyes, when, at some future and as yet unimaginable crisis, that answer will burst forth from the heart of mankind itself. But mankind, as yet, cannot be said, in any intelligible sense, to have a heart to feel or a past to build upon—the word mankind itself being no more than a sort of biological umbrella

to cover all the otherwise disconnected units of this particular species.

What there may be, as yet, of a cosmopolitan self-consciousness is at best but faintly astir in a few scattered and exceptional spirits. That may be deplored as evidence of a dangerously overdue development in human evolution, but deplore it or not, there it is, and it will take more than our lifetimes to make up for arrears.

The answer to the Sphinx's riddle cannot therefore emanate from mankind, because, for longer than we can compute, there will be no mankind in effective being to answer anything.

But the case is different with those great social bodies that have grown up into consciousness of their own individuality, and may truly be said, though in varying degrees, to have acquired a memory, and a past, and a soul of their own. Everybody has a good enough working knowledge of what is meant when it is said that Rome's way was so and so, or that Israel had forsaken Jehovah and gone whoring after strange gods. And when Mr. Pitt spoke of England saving Europe by her example, even his bitterest critic would not have professed to be in the least doubt of his meaning.

England is capable of setting an example no less than Pitt himself, or the greater leader whom we have to-day. If she saved Europe then, she, or the wider entity that has grown up out of her, may save more than Europe now.

The how and why of the process by which countless seemingly detached personalities combine to form one just as definite super-personality, may as yet be incapable of scientific explanation, but no more so than the way in which the mere thought of lifting one's arm, causes that solid object to rise up, in spite of every single atom in the whole solid earth pulling its hardest to keep it down. All we know is that the former event, like the latter, does actually happen. We feel it in ourselves to be true, and the whole of our experience confirms it for fact. We can be as sure of the common as we are of the individual self; nor can we conceive of the one without the other. And the recognition of this fact is the beginning of patriotism.

For it is a vulgar conception that would limit the whole duty

of a patriot to the performance of such prescribed and limited tasks as those of military or other state service. Our country needs us not only to serve, but to be it. And this is a duty from which none of us is exempt, from the cradle to the grave, since it comprises all that we think and dream, no less than that which we will and do. What we make of ourselves we make the self of all ourselves, and by that, conceivably, the fate of mankind may, in its turn, be made or marred.

Whatever answer, therefore, to the Sphinx's riddle, British civilization may have to give, must, like that of a British jury, be one for which all its members share a like responsibility, since there can be no question of shifting it on to the shoulders of the government or the state, or of sitting still and allowing the powers that be to have the running of us. Surely the most terrifying of all imaginable responsibilities, if we consider what it implies!

For it is not as if it were our fate or nature to be bound to a one-way track; nor is there the least reason for assuming that because things *have* happened in a certain way, that was the only way they *could* have happened. Time and again, if we examine their course closely, we shall hardly be able to resist concluding, not only that they might, but that they ought to, have turned out just the opposite. Peoples are perfectly capable of playing false to their own souls and of turning back from the plough with the furrow half drawn. Sometimes it is quite easy to see what was the point at which the fatal turning was taken. We are all chosen peoples, but not all of us justify the choice. Otherwise we should have to put down Shakespeare as the most drooling of platitudinarians, in exhorting England to rest true to herself. For what should we think of the most incurable idiot—let alone Shakespeare—who, mistaking a gramophone record for a singer, adjured it only to play *God save the King*, and never the *Red Flag* or the *Horst Wessel* song?

In the days when historians were not only the writers of past, but the makers of future history, they were as often concerned to record the failure, as the success, of peoples in remaining true to themselves. We have indeed those epic historians who have laboured only to build up the greatness of their subject in the minds of posterity—it is the Greece of Herodotus whose glory,

and the Rome of Livy whose grandeur, survive. But there is an Athens of Thucydides whose glory was brought down to the dust, and a Rome of Tacitus that exchanged grandeur for slavery. And the pity and the terror with which the theme is invested are dependent on the tragic understanding that it need not, and ought not, to have happened thus, if these peoples had rested true to themselves. But grant a certain instability in the Athenian, and corruption in the Roman soul—and then, we are made to feel, the tragic unfolding of events is indeed pre-determined, with the sureness of fate. For character, as one of the earliest Greek philosophers perceived, *is* fate. Our truth to ourselves is in our own power, and by the measure of it is our destiny determined beyond subsequent appeal.

### 3. THE SUPER-RATIONAL IMPERATIVE

That is easy to say, but taken as it stands, it is hardly calculated to cut ice with an English audience. For I doubt whether there is any true Englishman who, if he only felt free to do so, would not cordially approve of Pontius Pilate's well-known refusal to allow truth in the abstract to be debated in the workaday course of justice. Except that an English judge would have been even more explicit:

"Truth? What truth? This is wasting the time of the court. Keep to the facts and the point, and the truth will take care of itself."

Such, at any rate, is the most probable line for any Englishman to take, if you inform him that his salvation depends on his resting true to himself. He has heard that before, and it has not impressed him. To put it bluntly—what are you getting at? Where is all this meant to lead? And in what particular way might England's truth to herself be supposed to differ from that—let us say—of France, or the Soviet Union, or even Germany, to themselves?

In a charming fragment of autobiography, Ruskin has informed us how, as a tiny boy, he once preached a sermon of eleven words (which he subsequently appears to have expanded into the 39 ponderous tomes of his collected works) on the text "People

be good ". And a very good text too, if you could find a way to put it into practical operation. But until that time comes, it is, by the English way of thinking, not good enough. Nor its cognate " England, to thyself rest true ", even though Shakespeare were the preacher—not, at anyrate, until we are sufficiently informed about the quiddity and quantum of the truth indicated.

It would be idle to complain of this attitude, because no Englishman could possibly rest true to himself—*qua* Englishman—without taking it. For it springs from what is the strongest in the English mind, the tremendous practicality that demands to be continually in touch with the concrete reality of its object, and values ideas only in so far as they can be made to work. " Cut the cackle, and get to business " is—or was up to a very recent time—its motto. Though now that the minds and the cackle are both subject to high powered mass production, we cannot be quite so sure of the strength being maintained.

Getting to business, in this case, means satisfying the demand of an English audience for a practical elucidation. This truth of England (and one might equally say of Britain, or of Greater Britain) to herself, in what does it consist, more than a pious platitude and sermon text? Is there, in any distinctive sense, such a thing at all?

But the answer to this, as it happens, has been given by the audience itself. For now the whole nation is united, as never before, in one common and heroic endeavour to preserve its soul and way of life inviolate. And by what conceivable means could such an endeavour be sustained short of a common certainty of there being something peculiar to England, and of which she is the guardian, that makes any effort and sacrifice supremely worth while, a certainty, moreover, so absolute as to override all sober and rational calculation?

For that is where her enemies, and particularly Hitler, have so signally failed to get the measure of her. One can be almost sorry for the poor bewildered Führer for the way in which these unpredictable islanders persisted in acting in defiance of all probability and all reason, thereby stultifying a programme that had been planned with such meticulous foresight, and carried to its penultimate stage with such infallible success. After the frightful series of catastrophes, that must have astonished even

the victors themselves, culminating in the ignominious overthrow of France and the disarming of the only force left to defend her shores from invasion, not only Germany, but the whole world, knew that England was down and out. Beaten—if we may put it that way—several times deep. For supposing the blow to the heart were to fail—as did not seem likely—she could, in a time that could be foreseen with something like certainty, be starved into surrender by the E-boats, and her cities and factories, as Hitler himself put it, “rubbed out” by overwhelming air power, one after the other. She could be driven by superior sea power out of the Mediterranean; driven out of the Near East by military odds of five or ten to one; out of the Far East by the certain accession of Japan to the vultures on the carcass of her empire. The chances of her survival few neutral observers estimated at more than one in a hundred; what remotest chance there could be of her winning none could conceive.

What fairer offer, what more blessed respite could there be, than for the omnipotent man-god to check his thunder in mid volley and grant her to live and not die, with her empire intact, and her cities standing? And the nation that had dissolved in ecstasies of relief for being allowed to pass beneath the yoke at Munich! Hitler, for reasons of his own, was prepared to do this—for a time. But now, instead of the joy bells and thanksgiving services, instead of the flight of statesmen to his headquarters to pluck the flower safely, there was a blank silence. To no one in the doomed island did it seem to have occurred that such an offer could be taken seriously. End the war? And with That Man where he was, and what he was? Not likely!

To Hitler, and not only to Hitler, but to observers of the situation, of other than British stock, all over the world, such an attitude did not make sense. Even after the Battle of Britain, Rudolf Hess was so sure it could not be really serious, that he was prepared to stake his whole career on his assurance that once the proper people had had the offer fairly put to them, they would rush to close with it, brushing aside Churchill, and his cabal of associate or kindred Jews, who were holding it up.

Which calculation would have held perfectly good, but for one thing that it was impossible to imagine men like Hitler and Hess

being capable of suspecting. Since that time at Munich, something had happened to England. She had come awake. She had recollected what she was and what she stood for. The fall of Europe had shaken her out of the last remnants of her lethargy, and caused her to mobilize all her spiritual reserves. And consequently when the crisis arrived, she was found resting true to herself, and as firm as a rock. And in the teeth of all odds and all calculations, the saying was literally fulfilled—nothing did, and nothing could, make her rue.

Now you might talk of a faith that will remove mountains as a piece of oriental hyperbole. But suppose that some yogi or mystic were to command some particular mountain to move in a given direction and move it did, before your eyes, you might concede that plain faith was as practical a proposition for moving mountains as plain vans for moving furniture. And I think that the same might hold good in this matter of England's truth to herself. To turn the tide against Hitler in 1940 constituted almost as fantastically impossible a feat as moving a mountain. But England did rest true to herself, and the tide was turned.

And turned as palpably as one of our Channel tides turns, at the precise minute stated in the calendar. It is not just a question of adding a halo of rhetorical glamour to the statement that this country, being attacked by a superior enemy, managed to defend herself with courage and success. I mean that something in her common consciousness caused her to act, without the least hesitation, in a way that otherwise would have been judged reckless to the point of suicide; and to do so in the unquestioning confidence—to which everyone who saw will bear witness—that she *could* bring it off. From a business people, to bank on such confidence ought to have been barred. Practical men do not stake their all against a certainty, or against odds so great as to constitute a practical certainty. Unless on one condition only: that some deeper than business instinct, overriding the calculations of ordinary prudence, has implanted a certainty of a superior order, so that when reason says:

"Give it up. Can't you see for yourself that you have not a dog's chance in persisting along such and such a line? The thing is impossible."



something for which, if there were no such word as soul, we should have to invent one, counters with:

"By God, it has got to be possible!"

For nations, as for men, there is sure to come a time for dropping the indicative mood, and thinking thus in the imperative. It is by the capacity to know that time, and to seize it, that their greatness is measured. Such times have occurred in the history of every people. They have occurred more than once in that of England. Times when she set herself to do the impossible, and did it, because anything less would have been unthinkable. Or, as an Englishman would be more likely to express it—not done.

#### 4. WHAT WAS TRUE FOR OUR FATHERS

With so glorious a vindication of this people's truth to itself in the hour of crisis, the temptation is to regard it as final and all-sufficient. What more could the most exacting of patriots desire to see?

The answer is—a great deal more. What happened after the fall of France was cause enough for thanksgiving, and excuse enough for pride. Nobody will be concerned to dispute that. But it falls far short of proving that all is for the best in the best of all possible Englands. And it may conceivably still fall short of the bare minimum demanded for her continued existence.

For this that we call her truth to herself is subject to two highly significant qualifications. It is not, as far as its practical operation is concerned, continuous, and for the most part it is not consciously realized.

That tendency to keep her best energies in reserve for times of mortal crisis is one that in the past might have been counted to her for a wise economy. But as I have tried to show, it is more than she can afford under conditions so completely revolutionized as to put the wisdom of our fathers out of date. But in what way and to what extent this wisdom had become folly and a death trap, can only be judged after we have appreciated, from their standpoint, in what it consisted, and how well it served for the practical purpose of building up Britain to what she has now come to stand for.

Throughout all these centuries of growth, it will be observed that the only vital crises, those in which the issue is so delicately poised, that if it goes the wrong way, utter and irretrievable catastrophe follows, are those that have arisen in the course of war. If the invasions projected by Philip of Spain or Louis XIV had achieved their object, it is not too much to say that the whole course of our history would have been changed. Some may say changed for the better—that is matter for debate. But that it would have been changed radically and permanently there can be no doubt at all. The life cord of British development would have been cut. Nobody would ever have dreamed of anything remotely resembling the Commonwealth of Nations. Nobody could have thought of British liberty—even supposing it to have existed in any form whatever—as something distinctive and unique, differing fundamentally from liberty on the Continent, and constituting something new, and without counterpart in the record of civilization.

But great and momentous as our peace time crises have been—and I would add to them even those warlike ones into which the threat of immediate conquest from abroad did not enter—I do not think that anything of this sort could be fairly said about even the greatest of them. They were not, in the same sense, potentially catastrophic. If things had gone wrong, there is no saying that they might not have rightened themselves more or less in the course of a generation or two. I say more or less, because the work of creative genius, once it is lost, is beyond the power even of time to reproduce. If Shakespeare had been knocked on the head in a poaching affray, there would have been no Hamlet. And if King John had brought off his overseas policy, as he so nearly did—though the work that was done at Runnymede might still eventually have been made good in other ways, there would have been no Magna Charta, because there would have been no Archbishop Langton to give imperishable form to those clauses which—in spite of all the efforts of all the pedants who have tried to explain them away—were, and are, the foundation stones of British liberty. And without the constantly renewed inspiration of these clauses to an understanding patriotism, who shall say for certain that the Magna Charta of England

would have been followed, in its due season, by the Magna Charta of the Commonwealth that takes its name from a site only a few miles down stream from Runnymede, that of Bramble Isle or Westminster? Or, even so, that there would have been a Statute of Westminster, such as we have it, but for the conjunction among its framers of the two philosopher statesmen, Balfour and Smuts.

We can never say absolutely for certain about anything in the past, however small, that if it had happened otherwise, or not happened at all, the course of events would not have been radically deflected. Who knows what tremendous effects may not develop in the course of time out of the most infinitesimal causes! We can only, so to speak, give the past the benefit of the doubt, and assume that it *would* have worked out much as it did unless we can produce overwhelming reason for believing that it could not possibly have done so. Looking back over the development of the way of free civilization that I have ventured to characterize as our British heritage, one can see that it has been built up as if on the persistent assumption that there was no need to hurry, and that like the oak, once it was fairly planted, provided no enemy were allowed to come with an axe and sever the trunk, the tree would continue to grow and flourish while men slept.

Nothing, I think, is more characteristic of British history, as compared with that of other nations, than the almost complete absence in those who have done most to shape it, of any consciousness of the destiny that, as we can see in retrospect, they were continuously shaping. We talk of builders of Empire (meaning non-empire) and architects of liberty—and with good reason, in the sense that all their actions work out in effect *as if* they had been working from the first to the design of some master builder.

But get down to the facts themselves, not as they are presented through the distorted medium of the text books, but as we may arrive at them through the first hand evidence of those who experienced them, and we shall see that there was less conscious planning of either of these stupendous constructions than goes to the building of an ordinary child's sand castle. A man came and laid a stone, because that was the thing to do, or because it would pay him to do it; and another came and added some piece of decoration, because he loved the place, and liked doing it;

and whole teams combined to do this or that job of haulage or lifting, because quite obviously that job had got to be done—and then one day an idle fellow who had been staring, and getting in the way, suddenly cried out:

“Look what it’s going to be—that palace, that temple, like nothing on earth before! Oh, for heaven’s sake be quick and finish it!”

But as the practical men round him could imagine no palace, and see no temple, they carried on, as before, with their several motives and tasks. And a long, long time had yet to pass before the unique structure began to take form in the world’s eye.

That, it must be admitted, is a most wasteful and slovenly way of constructing anything. You cannot expect the same clean cut results from the architecture of hit and miss, as you get from the lucid planning of the French style at its best, or from the massive thoroughness of preparation that characterizes the Prussian. But for all that, the unformed plan may grow to incomparably nobler proportions than those that were defined and limited by the pre-conceived notions of the architect. So at least it may have proved in this architecture not of stones, but of souls.

## 5. EQUILIBRIUM UNSTABILIZED

Everyone can judge for himself how accurately this picture expresses the facts. English freedom, we may say, came into existence as a sort of unforeseen by-product of a number of quite different processes. But I think it will hardly be disputed, nowadays, that by far the most important of these was a process of law. Tennyson was employing, as he so often did, language of the strictest scientific accuracy, when he spoke of freedom as having broadened down from precedent to precedent. But the judges who made the precedents, and the lawyers who put the final polish on these foundation stones of freedom, so far from being swayed by any libertarian enthusiasm, seemed mainly concerned to keep the mystery of litigation as interminable and expensive and complicated as possible, in the interests of the great lawyers guild, the most powerful in the country. And by the very nature of their calling, judges were, generally speaking, old

gentlemen of an overbearing and ultra-conservative cast of mind. But from making a fetish of their mystery, and of their own importance as its heirophants, they came to build a sort of impenetrable *cheveau de frise* round the liberties of the subject.

And then again, the drama of our constitutional liberties assumes a very different complexion, when we get down to the actual motives and personalities of the protagonists, from that which it bears in the romantic rescension of Macaulay, Green, and the high orthodox apostolate of Victorian Whiggery.

It may be going too far the other way to see in the triumph of Parliament merely the result of a chronic conspiracy, first feudal then plutocratic, to seize the controls of the state, and exploit the resources of the many in the interests of the few; but at least a more plausible case could be made out for this version than for the other. And yet out of this imbroglio of intrigue and cross purposes the liberties did come, and were steadily consolidated and increased, at a time when all over the Continent representative institutions were being flattened out under the weight of despotic sovereignty.

And as for the expansion of British civilization into a world commonwealth, it was so little foreseen or intended, that Britain might not unfairly be likened to a person who keeps putting on weight, to his own great disturbance, in spite of all efforts to keep himself slim. The conquest of India by a commercial company that had never wanted to go there at all, and once there, had wanted anything rather than to mix up trade with politics; and the way in which an equally unwilling country was finally forced to take over from the company the directorship of a vast empire, is a story more fantastic than anything in fiction—though less so than that of the same country strenuously trying to cut adrift its daughter nations overseas, and being defeated by the determination of these same nations to remain in partnership, though without any obligations on the partners.

Some critic may perhaps object that this, after all, would probably be found to be as true of other nations as of England; if we came to contrast the purposes of the individual shapers of each several destiny with the results they achieved. But would it? Let us take the instance of France. Up, at any rate, till the

time of the Third Empire, the average French monarch or statesman knew perfectly well what he wanted, and either succeeded or failed to get it—the two great Cardinals, for instance, Richelieu and Mazarin, very deliberately built up the structure of the centralized despotism that Louis XIV, with equal clarity of purpose, brought to perfection. The great French revolutionaries, and Napoleon, and Talleyrand, were, in the strictest sense, planners; they did not go ahead blindly and trust to providence or the chapter of accidents to discover a plan for them at some later date.

But the latter is what, in effect, most of the leading figures in British history would seem to have done. Nobody for instance did more to make Parliament sure of the sovereignty it eventually achieved than its mighty ally, Henry VIII, or to commit England to the paths of what he himself would have regarded as combustible heresy; Oliver Cromwell made it his avowed principle not to know where he was going, and that principle has been put into practice—though they did not avow it—by the most dynamic of his successors in shaping the destiny of England. The names of Peel and Gladstone come particularly to the mind in comparatively recent times, and at least one name could be cited more recent still, and certainly no less conspicuous.

Now I can imagine no more obvious lead for the patriotic propagandist at such a time as this, than to concentrate upon this tendency, and make it the theme for unstinted panegyric. The thing has been done already, and with unsurpassable eloquence, by Carlyle, who had the more excuse for it, as he was writing just over a hundred years ago—and it is perhaps fortunate that his notorious fall into the Prussian abyss has rendered him an unfit subject for resurrection. For it is hard indeed not to be carried away by so persuasive an advocacy of the English character as embodied in a "thick-skinned, seemingly opaque, perhaps sulky, almost stupid Man of Practice, pitted against some light, adroit, Man of Theory."

"Nay, withal," goes on the pleader, "you are certain that his jumbings and tumbings will end, after years or centuries, in the stable equilibrium."

After years or centuries! Mark well those words, for in them is revealed the fallacy lurking beneath the surface of all such

reasoning when it is applied to modern conditions. For it is assumed that all those years and centuries will continue to be available in the future as much as in the past, for the system to equilibrate. Whereas the result of jumbling and tumbling becomes more and more immediately the collapse of the system, after which there is no question of equilibrium.

## 6. DOES IT WORK?

It is impossible to imagine a more dangerous situation than that of a people which has built up a habit of living through long centuries of toil and conflict, and has proved it sound against every trial, when, through some change of circumstance, that soundness is undermined. It is as if some arctic river, which had served as a highway, had, for the first time in memory, begun to thaw—while the crackings and groanings of the surface passed unheeded by those who glided along it.

That, if you come to think of it, is the tragedy of all the millions of species that have had their day and passed to extinction. They had adapted their way of life to certain conditions; the conditions had changed and the way went on—into nowhere.

I am not for the moment speaking of what British civilization has come to be, and to signify, nor yet what it is capable of becoming—its cumulative heritage; but of the way in which, up to the present, that heritage has been achieved. And what has been distinctive of this British way is, as I have tried to show, that it has lain almost entirely below the surface of consciousness. It is like the way of the young swallows when, at the end of summer, they take flight for the south; they feel they have got to take it, and they are content to find out what is at the end of it when they get there. But that is putting it a little too absolutely. For the British nature is capable on occasion of a terrific output of deliberate, planned energy. Once let the whole nation be aroused to the necessity of going all out in a contest, and it will outclass the habitual planners at all points of their own game. It will outgun and outsail the Invincible Armada; it will produce a Marlborough to out-general, and a Wellington to out-organize,

the most brilliant of Continental war-lords; it will justify, time and again, its reputation for winning the last battle.

The silent Mr. Bull, beloved of Carlyle, becomes a second Odysseus—a man of infinite devices. But the moment the last battle is won, the devices are laid aside, and the same unending Bull, as dumb and thickskinned as ever, resumes his blind butting along the path of whatever destiny the gods may some day be pleased to elucidate for him.

Or, if he condescends to answer his critics at all—which is unlikely—he will grunt out:

“Old ways are best ways, my lad. This has done me well enough, and it’ll last out my time.”

You might very reasonably point out that this does not follow at all, being precisely the logic of the motorist who, having found the road to go straight for a very long way, considers it safe to go to sleep at the wheel—and you can point out that whether he likes it or not, Mr. Bull, having insisted on getting himself the most powerful machine money can buy, has got to think in these terms now.

But you will certainly be wasting your breath, because to plead logic with our friend is merely to irritate him. Bull does not believe in logic. And he has satisfied himself in the course of his long experience, that his own particular kind of home-bred common sense shows vastly better results in practice than other people’s logic. And though it might have been Colonel Blimp, it was actually General Cromwell, who said that a man never rises so high as when he does not know where he is going. And Oliver Cromwell was right, having been proved so not by grinding the wind of logic, but by the only test that Mr. Bull will ever consent to apply. Does it work? Has it worked? Has it not! See for yourself how high he has risen, and how wider still and wider his girth has become.

Well then, let us put it at that. Let us apply the test, and apply it fairly. For Bull, though as obstinate as his name implies, has the reputation of being a reasonable fellow at bottom once let it penetrate his skull that you may after all be talking not logic, but fact. Put it to the test of fact, and—what counts for most with a practical man—recent fact. Is it so certain that the



old way of blind intuition has continued to work with the success it did in the past?

Here a very apposite comparison leaps to the mind. We have seen—except those of us who are very young—how Britain, in the first World War, by a grand mobilization not only of manpower, but also of mind-power, succeeded in throwing her decisive weight into the scales of an Armageddon involving practically the whole of Western civilization, and how, in company with her allies, she was able to reduce her adversary to the acceptance of whatever terms they could agree among themselves to impose upon him. And everyone knows how, almost exactly a century before, she had found herself in essentially the same enviable position after the final overthrow of Napoleon.

Moreover the parallel holds just as good in the domestic as the international sphere. For in 1815, even more pronouncedly than in 1918, her social system was in a process of violent transition, so violent as to pauperize, in the most literal sense, something like a quarter of the entire population.

Now in dealing with both aspects, international and domestic, of this former, post-Waterloo, situation, the authentic English way was adopted. Mr. Bull, true to the character in which he was to be worshipped by Carlyle, was in no sort of a hurry. The war was over and the first call was to get back politics and diplomacy and everything else, as much as possible on to the comfortable pre-war footing, after which one could only sit back and wait for events to clarify themselves, trusting to inherited experience and native common sense for guiding them towards a reasonably pro-British equilibrium.

In the foreign sphere this succeeded brilliantly, and it was with the full support of public opinion that those exceptionally able Foreign Ministers, Castlereagh and Canning, followed by Palmerston, were able to check the drift to European stagnation under a committee of despots, and give free institutions at least a chance to strike root. And at home—though it is a hard saying—a substantial balance of success might also have been claimed. Amateur statesmen, who understood far more about the run of a fox than they did about the running of a factory, put their faith in the good old way of muddling through, and muddle through

they did, at the cost of waste and suffering and ugliness unspeakable, to the staggering record of mounting and multiplying prosperity that began in the late 'forties, and lasted, more or less, for the rest of the century.

There were no doubt plenty of flies in their excellent ointment, and it might turn out that the main problem had not been solved, but only deferred, and made more intractable by delay. But grant the spirit of his fathers to survive in the twentieth century Englishman, was it not safe to assume that his jumbings and tumbings would likewise end, somehow and some time, in producing the customary equilibrium? Or was it as safe as all that?

For compare the post-war situation of the early Twentieth with that of the early Nineteenth Century. Allowing for the inevitable difference of scale and national grouping, the problems, international and domestic, presented to this country for solution, would appear to have been in every essential respect the same in both cases, save only for whatever transformation may have been brought about in the pace and conditions of life by a full century of its progressive mechanization. But this last factor seems to have been ruled out by the tacit agreement from whatever may have been the calculations of the twentieth century peacemakers, since they could think of no better way than what was in effect that of fitting the same old solution to the same old problem, as if they had decided that what was good enough for their fathers was good enough for them.

The very words—if I may be permitted to repeat them—that I used to describe the first post-war attitude will be seen to apply equally to the second:

*"Mr. Bull was in no sort of hurry. The war was over and the first call was to get back politics and diplomacy and everything else as much as possible on to the comfortable pre-war footing, after which one could only sit back and wait for events to clarify themselves, and trusting to inherited experience and native common sense for guiding them towards a reasonably pro-British equilibrium."*

And it might be added, of both cases alike, that ink being cheaper than blood, so much of it would not be grudged as was needed for affixing the national signature to any League, Holy Alliance, peace pledge, or high-falutin' declaration of principle

that did not involve any too definite practical commitments.

As for the social problem, that had naturally come to exercise the minds of statesmen and people to a much greater degree in the sequel of 1918 than that of 1815, but even so it cannot be said that this had led to any perceptible advance in the method of dealing with it—except verbally. After the hot air about homes for heroes, and so forth, had gone up in smoke, the party machinery was got going again, and the various issues were left to be thrashed out in the course of politics as usual.

Only this time the method, the inherited, well-tried, and always hitherto successful English method, conspicuously failed to work according to precedent, either without or within. It led from the Great to the ever Greater War; it was powerless to avert the drift to the Great Slump, or to cure the malignant, mass growth of unemployment. This time it was no question of muddling through, but of blundering over the precipice, and floundering in the quicksand. It would be easier to maintain that black was white and day night, than that the English way had been justified by success, even in such measure as had always attended it hitherto.

To blame it on to the leaders would be disingenuous. Even in foreign policy, it is at least disputable whether Mr. Lloyd George's brilliance, ballasted with the aristocratic tradition of Curzon and Balfour, produced a combination in any way inferior to the not altogether dissimilar one of Canning and Castlereagh. And certainly there was an incomparably higher standard of competence for dealing with economic and social problems among the statesmen and politicians even of the deplorable Parliament of 1918, than had been dreamed of during the long, leaden Premiership of the Earl of Liverpool. Only one explanation seems possible. It is not the men, but the conditions that have changed. The type of method and mentality that served so well and so long for the old England is out of date. What was good for the fathers is *not* good enough for the children. Our English heritage is unimpaired; time has rendered it more precious than ever, not only to ourselves but to mankind. But our way of guarding it must be brought up to date. Otherwise we shall lose it, and losing that, will lose everything.

## 7. THE VALOUR OF KNOWLEDGE

What is it that we have noted as being most distinctive in the past of our British way of conducting our common affairs? Surely this—that on all but a few abnormal occasions of belligerent urgency we have preferred to rely on the part of our mind that lies below the conscious surface. We had rather be guided by what we should call our deepest, but what less favourably disposed critics might characterize as our blindest instincts, than strive in the light of conscious knowledge towards some clearly envisaged goal. The Englishman has greater faith in an inner light that is not seen, and a purpose that he cannot define. And he can fairly claim that up to a very recent period, that faith never let him down. The silent Englishman never knew better what he was about than in refusing to know what he was about. He knew, because he had found that in the long run it paid. People might call him a dull ox, and a canting hypocrite—but that was the homage paid by envy to success. So at least it flattered him to conclude.

Then what, you may ask, can have put this faith out of date and turned it to a fatal delusion? Why having worked so long should it have ceased to work now? The answer to that question would be best sought by way of another. Why is it that on certain occasions of specially urgent crisis, this very faith has by general agreement had to be dropped, and swift, total, lucidly conceived action, to be undertaken in the full light of consciousness? Even Cromwell himself, who of all Englishmen trusted most blindly to the direction of that inner self that he called the Lord, could not do so all the time. Cromwell the political careerist, Cromwell the law-crushing superman, Cromwell the uncrowned patriot king, Cromwell the God-drunken idealist—for his unquestioning self-acceptance allowed him to be all of these things at once with a quiet conscience—did no doubt rise higher than any other Englishman by the good old English prescription of not knowing where he was going. But Cromwell the past master of cavalry tactics, the organizer of victory?

Here the boot was on the other leg. For it was because Crom-

well grasped more explicitly than any man of his time what had to be done and how to do it, that he started training his Ironsides so that he might know not only exactly where he was going, but also how to get there through and over all opposition. And by those means he rose as high as the crowning mercy of Worcester—the battle without a morrow.

For it is notorious that in war, and particularly with the mobile arm, the balance between victory and defeat may be so delicately poised that the minutest error of direction and timing may be decisive; and therefore, until the issue is decided, everybody concerned, from the commander downwards, has got to keep his conscious faculties employed and continuously on the stretch. Here then is a case, when, by his own admission, the Englishman's faith in his subconscious impulses is liable to betray him, and for this reason—that the pace of events may be so speeded up as to give no time to recover from a mistake. And the man who does not know where he is going, will be done for altogether at the first false step, and there will be no question of learning from it. But in the pre-mechanized age such conditions only materialized very exceptionally, even in time of war. The crises in which the nation's energies were anything like fully mobilized, may be averaged at not more than once in a century.

And save when a blow to the heart was actually threatened, the Englishman stuck imperturbably to his way of plodding stolidly along, not knowing where he was going—but getting there all the same.

The whole history of British liberties, of British expansion, of British commercial and industrial progress, of British social reform, and, except on occasions of exceptional crisis, of British war-making, is—when the truth is told—about the most consistently untidy, hit and miss record that any nation has to show. No target is ever hit, unless it has been missed two or three times previously. Seldom is any advance registered except by way in and out of one or more blind alleys. Hardly any great object is ever attained save as the unforeseen resultant of cross purposes and irrelevant ambitions. But always, sooner or later, comes into play the great redeeming factor of a common-sense and inherited wisdom that, given time, can be relied on to make the crooked

path into a highway for freedom, and to crown the muddling and blundering with success that the most elaborate planning could never have envisaged.

Given time! For in those two words is contained the subtle and deadly fallacy of the argument from that past to our present. In that past, as the results<sup>1</sup> prove, time *was* given—except, as I have indicated, in cases of exceptional, and always military, urgency—to rectify mistakes and allow second thoughts to come to the surface.

That way of growth is no longer possible under the conditions we have set for ourselves. We have got to take the development of our civilization in hand, not as a child grows, but as an athlete trains for victory. Henceforward we must shape our destiny in the full light of consciousness. We must become knowledgeable of our heritage.

We must know, that is to say, what is the unique nature and significance of this British-born order of free civilization for which we stand; what it is that makes our way as definitely the way of life for mankind, as that of the Total tyranny is the way of death.

We must know ourselves, collectively no less than individually: know what we have come to be, and what we have it in us yet to become. *Know thyself!* That is the first commandment of patriotism.

The second follows from it and is conditional upon its fulfilment: *To thyself be true!*

## III

## HERITAGE OF INSULARITY

## I. THE INCURABLE ENGLISHMAN

SINCE the art of writing was invented, no writer has ever been able to get away from either his origin or his audience; and writing as an Englishman about the common heritage of Englishmen for an English speaking audience, I am bound to approach the subject in the English way of thought.

And perhaps because I am an Englishman, it is the way I should deliberately choose anyhow. The fashion of denigrating everything English is peculiarly disingenuous when it extends to imputing a sort of intellectual second-rateness to the product of the two Bacons, of Hobbes, of Berkeley, of Newton, and of Darwin, compared with that of any Continental culture whatever. I do not maintain that our way of thinking is the best according to some absolute standard that only God knows how to apply, but I am sure that it is the best for us, and that judged by its fruits—which is the only test an Englishman cares to apply—it has nothing to fear from any comparison.

There are some who might, with a certain plausibility, be inclined to put the claim somewhat higher, but for that peculiar form of national shyness or modesty which causes the typical educated Englishman to prefer to be thought any sort of a fool or knave rather than a typical Englishman. And no wonder, after the sort of stage dummies, resembling nobody he has ever met in his life, and ranging from permanently half naked senior officers to more than half imbecile clergymen and politicians, whom it amuses him to see exposed to the sort of laughter that has been likened to the crackling of thorns under pots.

But—though to say so may be anathema in Bloomsbury—it can hardly be denied, even there, that of all the great historic European cultures, the English, though admittedly it has not wholly escaped from the blight that has fallen on all culture since

the lamps first began to go out in 1914, has yet retained its vital continuity and at least its potential vigour, while practically every one of the rest has either yielded up the ghost by gradual exhaustion, or precipitated itself enthusiastically beneath the Juggernaut of the new barbarism.

Even Matthew Arnold, if he could come back to earth, might think twice now before setting up a typical young Prussian to embody all that the British Philistine ought to be but is not. And I am afraid it may be quite an indefinitely long time before all the intellectual and artistic snobs in Europe are again vying with one another to be in the latest fashion dictated from Paris. More and more European culture, like European freedom, is tending to find its last refuge North of the Channel.

This is not to imply that our present mental equipment is anything like adequate to the demands of the new age. The whole of the preceding argument has gone for nothing unless I have made it clear that it is fatally inadequate, without drastic renewal and revision. But that does not mean that we have got to tear up the ancient growth by the roots and plant something totally different, but rather that it is our task to apply all the arts of intensive cultivation to foster and quicken it. To say that we have great arrears of progress to make up is not to imply that we have been off the right lines. It only means that we have to get on faster along those to which we are committed.

For even if we refuse to glory in it, we have perforce to resign ourselves to the necessity of remaining, in our inmost souls, quite incurably English, and never more so than when we profess to dissociate ourselves from everything that the word implies, except in a registrar's office. And this, notwithstanding that in its historic acceptation it is misleading even before it expands by undefinable stages into British, and thence into whatever word may be coined to include the Greater British of the Commonwealth, and finally all inheritors of what, for want of anything better, we have to call Anglo-Saxon civilization. This rough and ready indifference to the niceties of logical definition is, in itself, thoroughly English. For the Englishman likes to be the master and not the slave of his tools.



## 2. ONE ISLAND INSULARITY

I am afraid it may be thought that I am wandering from the theme into a purely academic discussion about the method of its presentation. But the theme is our British heritage, and of this the British way of thought constitutes an integral and essential part.

Now the *cliché* that is infallibly brought out of store to characterize English thought is the word "insular". And like perhaps the majority of *clichés*, it happens to be true, taken in the right sense. But what is wrong with those who use it is that they do so without the faintest inkling of how true it is—or in what way.

Of course we are insular. Living on an island, we could hardly be anything else. Though, for some reason or other, it never occurs to anyone to rub it in that we are equally, by the same logic, globular.

But what has the one, more than the other, to do with the way we think? For it seems rather a stiff proposition to assert that people on islands all think more or less alike. As though our mouths had just the slightest tendency to water at the sight of a plump gentleman in clerical garb! Or is there some bond of instinctive sympathy uniting English and Japanese that makes them realize, in the presence say, of Canadians, or Yankees, that insularity is thicker than blood? And does an Australian behave as a sort of insular-continental hermaphrodite? Or if not, how?

But to press logic as hard as that might strike an Englishman as not quite cricket. Of course, he would say, you know very well what is meant by being insular. People on islands tend to cut themselves off as much mentally as they are physically from the rest of the world. They are not such good international mixers as peoples on mainlands.

That sounds likely enough in the abstract, though it does not work out quite so neatly in the concrete. For there are many who would say that the French, with their clear-cut intolerance for any standpoint but their own, are easily entitled to the palm for European insularity, except for the really irrelevant circumstance of their not living on an island. That is, if we are to rule out the

Jews, as not being sufficiently European. And to go outside Europe, Englishmen have never made an open practice of equating "Foreigner" with "Devil", which the cultured and continental Chinese by all accounts did up to a quite recent date, and perhaps have not left off doing quite as universally as it may be tactful to assume.

But suppose, for the sake of argument, that insularity does tend to flourish rather more on islands than elsewhere, it must be remembered that Britain is no ordinary island. For what may be the greater part even of the time she was inhabited by man, she was not an island at all; now she is only just one. To lie within eyeshot, and gunshot, and less than five minutes' flying distance from the mainland, is to cut the margin of insulation uncomfortably fine.

It is of the utmost importance that we should get our minds clear on this insularity myth. The question, to which the answer always comes pat in an unthinking affirmative is—does the fact of living on an island tend to make Englishmen insular? But why should it? And is not this a plain case of the fallacy guyed by Dr. Johnson as that of "*They who drive fat oxen must themselves be fat*"?

No doubt it will be said it is because the sea cuts off Britain from the world. But does it? Or has it not, on the contrary, placed her so as to constitute the most accessible site in all Europe, the nodal centre of trade routes, the meeting ground of cultural influences, the melting pot of blood strains? Our very language is proof of the way in which we have levied contribution from every conceivable source, so that we can, and do, profess ourselves Teuton and Latin with equal plausibility according to which side we happen to favour.

The very untidiness of English thought, as compared with the neatness and lucidity of French, may at least be partly due to the greater number of diverse elements that the Englishman has to combine and harmonize.

Thus the definition in Webster's Dictionary of Insularity as "*2. State of dwelling on an island; hence narrowness or illiberality of opinion or custom*" makes, with all respect to that excellent authority, sheer nonsense, when applied to Britain.

But it does not follow that we are to discard that pregnant word "insular". For taken in the right sense it will be seen to be pertinently true. For the really important thing to grasp about Britain is not just that she is an island, since the deep is sown thick with islands, of every shape, size, and description, and the Continents themselves are merely very big, and as some people try to make out, floating islands. But Britain is not just one island among many, but of a size and shape and position exquisitely calculated to make her insularity something unique, and big with a unique destiny.

Just what sort of insularity is this British degree of insulation calculated to engender? Not, by any means, of the kind envisaged by the good old American lexicographer. For it has been so far from narrowing England's susceptibility to foreign influences, as to make her receptive of them to a positively greater extent than her Continental neighbours. But it did have the effect of making her receive them in a different way—her own way.

It was as if a high wall had been built all round her, pierced only by a few narrow entrances with turnstiles at which every newcomer could be stopped, and examined, and passed through with a view to conditional naturalization. The wall may be said to have been finally completed with the establishment of a sufficient sea power to render her immune from invasion.

This did not prevent ideas, any more than it prevented material imports, from arriving; but it did ensure that they should enter in such strength as she felt herself equal to controlling, and on such terms as it pleased her to impose. It is one of the stock charges to level against the Englishman that he is less ready than his opposite number on the Continent to take up ideas. What it really amounts to is that he has a hedgehog-like determination not to let other people's ideas take up him. He is not going to be a part of anyone else's system, unless it is that of the Apostle Paul, to prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good. No matter what sectarian label he may favour, something more potent than dogma has cast him for the role of the world's most incurable Protestant.

And that is what we mean when we talk, not of insularity in the abstract, but British insularity; the effect, that is to say, on

the British nature not of being born on an island, which might be anything or nothing, but of being born and bred on the one and only island of all islands capable of producing it.

This is not to deny that its effect on individual Englishmen may be, and often is, extremely deplorable. Such a rooted impatience of control is only too liable to get out of its own control, and run to every sort of extravagance and eccentricity. There is this advantage in submitting yourself to be part of a system, or—as I am afraid we should now say—ideology. It gives you some sort of a groove to run in, even to Hell; and you can know at once when you are off the rails. If you have travelled much in France you will be pretty sure to come up against the kind of Frenchman who does not know—and would not care—whether he is being inconsiderate and grasping and offensive to a degree almost inconceivable over here; but seldom will he fail to do it with a correctness and polish such as you could not get in the best English circles. Never shall I forget the stout *Monsieur* and *Madame*, who, after two hours' haggling and threatening over the matter of an almost imperceptible graze on the wing of an antediluvian looking contraption on wheels, concluded, after pocketing several times the amount of any conceivable damage, by assuring us that the good God would not fail to avenge our treatment of *des honnêtes gens*, by involving us in an evil accident on our way home, and then—without the least apparent sense of inconsistency—overwhelming us with bows and smiles, and “*bon voyage*” and “*au revoir, monsieur*” and “*au revoir, madame*” and I know not what besides.

It is the same when it is a question of expressing thoughts on paper. An Englishman, even if there is a good deal of solid sense in what he has to say, is liable to sprawl and flounder about so in the saying of it, falling into extravagance here and violence there, that very little of it gets across to the audience; while a Frenchman, even when he has next to nothing in his mind, will deliver himself of that minimum with such precision and elegance as to make it appear to be something of real importance.

Insularity, even in the English sense, besides being a strength, can be also, in some ways, a handicap. I do not think that this was ever brought out more clearly than in that classic essay of

Matthew Arnold on *The Literary Influence of Academies* which—in spite of the perverseness of its plea for setting up some counterpart of the French Academy to impose its authority upon English letters—ought to be read again and again till it is thoroughly assimilated by everyone who aspires to write, or to think, in good English. For there, by examples that have lost none of their relevance in the course of years, we are shown how not only in expression, but also in thought, Englishmen tend to fall victims to the besetting faults of their insularity—brutality, indiscipline, lack of balance, lack of a norm, all that is summed up in what on the Continent would be stigmatized as provincialism.

But to talk of insularity gone wrong as provincial is to miss the point. For about the idea of a province there is always a faint tinge of subordination; the provincial acknowledges a central authority and would only too gladly model himself on it, if he knew how. Whereas with the Englishman, the whole trouble arises from his insisting on being the centre of his own world, and conforming to no standard but his own. He is so sure of his own way being the right way, that instead of striving in all humility to make it so, he merely asserts, offensively or ridiculously, that it is so, after the manner of the immortal Mr. Podsnap, who though a caricature, is also a salutary warning. For to be insular in the British sense, is to be possessed of an uncompromising will to independence, a Protestant determination to deal with God direct, and like Bunyan's Christian, to go to heaven, not in a conducted party, but on his own initiative and responsibility. And that is a grievous and exacting responsibility for any poor, ordinary mortal to take on his own shoulders.

He who sets forth without a guide does not make his way arbitrary, but he does make it a great deal harder to keep, and he needs to condition himself to a far higher level of competence than if he had been content to take his marching orders from authority!

### 3. WHAT HITLER MIGHT SAY

It will be seen that insularity, in the British sense, is far from meriting the strictures that it is the fashion to pass on it. The

result of living on this of all islands need not be, and in fact has not been, to isolate its inhabitants from any of the good things, visible and invisible, that civilization has to give. Nor is there the slightest need for insularity to engender narrowness or Philistinism; though no doubt it may, if certain of the effects incidental to it are allowed to get out of control.

But it would be going too far to claim baldly that this British insularity is a good thing in itself, in the sense that its net result can be reckoned in advance for gain, either to the islanders themselves or to mankind at large. The most we dare assert is that it constitutes a tremendous challenge to make good. Or shall we say that it is as if it committed us to a game of win all or lose all? For unless Britain can vindicate her claim to have evolved a new and better order of civilization, she will have no escape from the black and damning indictment that will be pressed home against her as an inveterate betrayer and wrecker of the existing order. For there is a case against her that is at least as plausible on the surface as that for her, and we can only wonder at the unskillfulness of the hostile advocates who, in their eagerness to score every trivial point that offers from moment to moment, have failed to concentrate their efforts on the vital point in the main position.

It would be beneath our dignity, even in this time when truth itself is so often accounted for treason, to take advantage of their omission. For to be afraid of the truth, or to seek to doctor it in the interests of propaganda, is to give away our cause in advance. Let the worst be said against us, even if we have to say it ourselves.

Not that I am proposing to insult the intelligence of any educated reader by indulging in the sort of candour that has now become almost a ritual formula, except in a diminishing number of reactionary backwaters. Even that rather shadowy individual called the man in the street makes no bones about admitting that there are many things in this country's past record that will not bear looking into; and he is hardly more likely to endorse such proceedings as those of the Black and Tans, or the late General Dyer (though he might be hard put to it to give an accurate account of either) than he would those of Hitler himself.

Certainly it would be acting the part neither of a Christian nor a patriot to go about talking as if there had always been some original virtue peculiar to one's own countrymen, that justified them in assuming the attitude of the traditional Pharisee, and making a sort of Gospel record out of their history. And indeed those grand and amiable old boys who still go about glorifying their right old, tight old, hundred-per-cent, nigger-walloping, Gawd-who-made-me-mighty, British-imperial Reich, are, if they only knew it, doing better work for Hitler than the whole army of his official propagandists from Goebbels to Haw Haw.

The time for that is past, and if all that could be alleged against us was that, like every other nation that has ever existed, ours has qualified for the formula of the General Confession, there would be no need to make heavy weather of it. We are born to be sinners, though not necessarily miserable—and a trifle of more or less is not worth disputing about. And we certainly have nothing on our conduct sheet to compare with the French devastation of the Palatinate, the devilries of the Holy Office in Spain, the horrors of the Thirty Years' War in Germany, the atrocities of the Belgian Congo, or perhaps a dozen other monstrosities of the same sort one could recount, previous to the eclipsing of all records by the Total tyranny.

But the fully competent devil's advocate, such as has not yet arisen even in Germany, would drop these items from his brief, as merely calculated to distract the attention of the jury from the unique and capital charge that lies against Britain, and is nothing less than that of being first traitor to, and ever since wrecker of, the united civilization of the West.

What a chance Hitler missed, if he had only known how to sound the call to a crusade, not against Russia, but against Britain! And against Britain, in the forefront of all her other offences, for having maliciously and traitorously intervened to hamstring that most laudable of all European enterprises, the Eastward crusade.

Not for the first time, either! More than a century ago she had struck the same felon blow in the back of the great European Emperor or Führer, who had marshalled the forces of the West for the same holy purpose as Charlemagne, and the Teutonic

Knights, of driving back the dark and menacing surge of outer barbarism. For the most understanding of Napoleon's apologists have seen that his Moscow expedition was essentially a Crusade, or it would be more accurate to say, might have been if Napoleon had only been capable of knowing the hour of his visitation.

Perhaps we shall never realize how much we owe to Adolf Hitler for being the thing he is, instead of the infernally inspired genius that some of us have been tempted to imagine him. If only he had known how best to exploit that demagogic magnetism which is the secret of his success! If only he had known how to separate the one element of genuine fanaticism that was germinating in his confused little brain from the criminal mentality with which it was compounded, what a vastly more formidable foe he would have been as the Mahomet of a mechanized Islam!

We can imagine in what terms a *great* Hitler might have approached Britain in his bid for an alliance before the War, and in his final offer of a settlement after the fall of France. Or in what light he would have sought to expose her to the world after her rejection of it.

European civilization, he might have said, is a geographical and spiritual unity. It is a unity to which Britain naturally belongs, and of which for many centuries she acknowledged membership. It was her treason, more than any other factor, that prevented that unity from being restored after what otherwise would have been the merely temporary upheaval of the Reformation. It has been her constant design, pursued with every shift of diabolic ingenuity, to keep the unhappy Continent in the same state of anarchic disunion in which Germany herself had weltered for so long, impotent and miserable, before Bismarck applied the remedy of blood and iron.

At this point, we can imagine Hitler the Great, that might have been, loosing on us, in the world's ear, the full spate of his impassioned eloquence:

"Listen, my English friends! What Bismarck did for Germany then, destiny has called me to do for Europe now. The Barbarian is at her gates, and, what is worse, within the gates, at his deadly work of undermining the defences and corrupting the defenders. Meanwhile her resources are being wasted and her



energies dissipated in anarchy. She must unite or perish—there is not an hour to lose. I accordingly propose to unite her in the only possible way, by blood and iron, backed by a fanatical ideology. You can stand in partnership with me—I ask nothing better—or at least you can stand aside. But if you persist in standing in the way, then you are, by deliberate choice, not only a renegade and a traitor to the civilization to which you belong, but its mortal foe. And as such, I warn you for the last time, you will be crushed utterly, and brought—what is left of you—beneath the yoke you deserve!

“ You talk of your heritage. I have something greater to think of—the common heritage of our civilization, yours no less than ours, that the red flood from without threatens to submerge. What are our differences in face of that common enemy? I summon you to the Crusade—for the last time!”

This is no caricature. It is what Hitler might have said, if Hitler had been what he pretends to be. And we know that Rudolf Hess, that zealot with the burning eyes, the one member of that sinister junta whom we can credit with a really disinterested enthusiasm, was ready to stake everything—power, wealth, even the reversion of the Führership—on what must have seemed to him the certainty of the English falling for some such offer, once it was fairly put to them. Otherwise what explanation, short of stark lunacy, could account for his taking off on that lonely, and what we can hardly refuse to characterize as heroic flight, into the very jaws of the enemy?

I may be wrong about the actual Hess. The point is not worth arguing. But the existence of such a man as I have imagined, and his attempt to deliver such a message, are at least conceivable. Nor given the temper of the British nation, could any other conceivable reception have awaited him, than that of being put without parley under lock and key, pending the rounding up for trial of the rest of the gang—as any English man, woman, or child, could have told him beforehand.

So much for any real or possible Hess: no one is proposing to allow *him* any voice except from the dock. But supposing him to have come with such a message as that which I have put into the mouth of a certainly non-existent Hitler—can we afford to

thrust *that* aside with an equal contempt? For does it not have the effect of putting us in the dock, if not in the court of world opinion, at least before the tribunal of our own conscience? And is this charge such that we can hope to laugh it out of either court?

For what guilt could be comparable to that which qualifies nations no less than men for the lowest circle of Hell, that reserved for traitors—and perhaps for an even lower depth of infamy than that of Dante's traitors, since to betray civilization itself is surely more heinous than treason to any individual lord or city?

It is as though, if and when the authors of the Totalitarian tyranny come to stand before a more awful and impartial tribunal than any we are capable of setting up, they should claim to debar the whole proceedings on the ground that it is the plaintiff, Britain, against whom the indictment properly lies, and who ought to take their place in the dock.

And what answer shall we then be able to make? For we shall no longer, like the Colonel who arrested King Charles at Holmby House, be able to point to the silent array of our troops, and say, "*That* is our warrant." Nor shall we be able to silence the accuser by putting him where we have put Hess.

#### 4. APOLOGIA PRO VITA NOSTRA

This is no frivolous indictment. It does not even consist of a propagandist *macédoine*, à la *Vansittart*, such as might be concocted out of the records of any people whatever, with a sufficient assiduity in selection and lack of charity. It goes deeper than that—to the inmost soul of our civilization.

For the more inwardly we delve into our own past, the less we shall be able to find reason for denying that the main counts of it do but recapitulate the facts of history. England did indeed start in membership of a European civilization, the heritage of Rome. But in course of time she began to evolve a new way of her own, that she discovered in practice to be better suited to her own needs, and in which she persisted, with insular obstinacy and without the least consciousness of the revolutionary departure to which she was committing herself, until in fullness of time

the bonds that united her to Christendom, in a sense that for a full millenium she had conceived of it, were frayed so thin that the slightest tension was enough to snap them all at once.

But it was not only her own independence that was declared when Parliament invested King Henry VIII with the powers and prestige of an insular Pope, but the coming of age of a new order of civilization; new in the fullest sense, for it was different in kind from any that had ever existed on earth before. That difference was far from being apparent, or even suspected, at the time. It was, if we may put it that way, not manifest but implicit. On the top of some watershed you may see a young stream groping its uncertain way, as you may think, to discharge itself into the river beneath; nor does it cross your mind that it may be already committed to broaden and deepen into a mightier river, flowing far away in the opposite direction through other lands to a different ocean.

But England's decision, if we can use that word of what was hardly more a matter of conscious design than the fall of a stream, was not only to part company from the elder civilization. For an island to stand Protestant against a united continent, from which it was barely disjoined, was not an arrangement calculated to appeal to practical men. And these islanders were nothing if not practical. If they did not see, they acted as if they saw that this great adventure of evolving a new civilization would come to an ignominious end, unless two conditions could be fulfilled. First, this new order must, as soon as possible, expand to dimensions comparable to the old; and for this, seeing that all the space on the adjacent continent was already bespoken, it must radiate out by its seaways to take root in other continents: secondly, at any-rate until this process was complete, its only chance of survival lay in perpetuating the anarchy of European nations, and preventing the old civilization from ever coming together again under an effective leadership. For how could little England hope to hold out for long against a united Europe?

And England pursued this second aim with more persistence and deliberation than the first, gaining by experience a past mastery in the art of keeping her neighbour mainland divided against itself. She is pursuing it at this very moment. That is

what Rudolf Hess so signally failed to understand when he flew to her with what must have seemed to him his entirely reasonable offer of an accommodation. Not having the English tradition in his soul, it was naturally beyond him to grasp that no accommodation that involved leaving Europe under a master was thinkable in England.

Now at what other conclusion can we arrive than that Britain, before this ultimate tribunal we have imagined, will stand indicted on almost as serious a charge as Germany? For the next worst thing to uniting the whole of Europe on a footing of Total exploitation and slavery, is surely so to persist in bedevilling her affairs as to prevent her from ever being united at all.

And what defence will Britain plead to a charge, that would amount in the eyes of the world to that of being, by the most favourable showing, Public Enemy No. 2 of civilization? What, indeed, if we are to follow the fashion in advanced circles of regarding her as an ordinary national unit, one among many, of no more special significance to mankind than any other member of the European family? And it is almost painful to think of what would have been the fate of any writer between the two wars, who wanted to be taken seriously, had he dared hint that he considered any special virtue to be proper to the British way of thinking or doing or ordering things!

But though our intelligentsia are at least English in the fact that logic is not their strongest suit, they, like all the rest of us, have got to face up to the inexorable conclusion that if Britain is *not* right, in the sense that I am trying to indicate, Hitler *is*—in so far, at any rate, as he is now committed to the slogan of *Delenda est Britannia*. Whatever other strictures Europe may legitimately have to pass on his method, surely in that case she can have nothing but thanks for his determination to cut this malignant growth out of her system!

The issue is strikingly similar to that between Christianity, during the first three centuries of its existence, and the old Roman Empire. No one who has read his Gibbon can fail to see what a very strong case the government of the Cæsars had in its various attempts to stamp out what amounted, from its own point of view, to a vast conspiracy to undermine the foundations on which

the peace and empire of the civilized world reposed. And from the point of view that Gibbon shared with most of the intellectuals of his time and class, that case was irresistible. For the only really valid alternative to treating this new faith as a diseased growth in the body of the Empire would have been to recognize in it the germ of a spiritual empire destined to supersede and absorb that of Rome—to put new life into its rotting carcass, and thereby not to destroy but to save civilization.

Now this happened to be true: Christianity had it in itself to do this. But that is an argument that would have cut little ice with an intellectual Roman at the time of Pliny or Marcus Aurelius. And to-day it would be expecting rather much of human nature to expect Germans or Frenchmen or Italians to welcome a similar conclusion about a world order inspired by any British born conception, even of freedom itself.

Nevertheless such a world order has begun to take shape, capable of looking the old in the face and challenging it upon more than equal terms. That is the stupendous fact that has already transpired in the four centuries that have elapsed since England first asserted her independence of the older civilization. But that in itself will not be enough to justify Britain in her dealings with Europe, unless it can also be shown that the union of the Continent under some new Cæsar or dictator, on the basis of the former tradition, would have been as mortal a disaster to the nations involved as it would have been to Britain herself, and that Britain's policy of preserving an anarchy of sovereignties under the name of Balance of Power did at least keep matters in suspense until the time should be ripe for these nations to enter upon *her* heritage, and come together in an order, not of death and slavery, but of life and freedom.

## 5. WHY WE MUST BECOME HERITAGE CONSCIOUS

It will be seen that we have no choice but to justify ourselves in the eyes of the world, or to stand condemned. And in case anyone should be cynical enough to inquire, "And what if we do?" let him reflect that of all our national assets, our good name is the one we can least afford to dispense with. Let that be taken

from us, and we shall wake up to find that the Commonwealth of Nations has ceased to exist and that the Atlantic has become a gulf as impassable as that between Abraham's bosom and what once had been Dives.

And indeed, not all her valour and sea power would have enabled Britain to play the decisive part she did in almost every major European conflict, unless it had been that she had been able to convince a sufficient number of her neighbours that her cause was their cause, and that if she had fallen the freedom of Europe would have fallen with her.

That necessity is stronger than ever now that the time approaches when she will have to contribute something more positive than her veto to the settlement of Europe. It may have been enough, after she had disposed of Napoleon, to have forced upon her late allies the policy defined by Canning as that of each for himself and God for us all. But this time even if we consign Hitler to a warmer place than we did Napoleon, and send the entire managing directorate of what he calls his New Order to keep him company, we shall merely be left with the job on our own hands. Everybody is agreed that some sort of a new order has got to come—and if not Hitler's, then what? One based on similar principles, though under a different management? That does not sound very hopeful. Or on a different principle altogether?

It is at this point that the alternative way of civilization that one is forced to miscall Anglo-Saxon comes into the picture.

For, if you consider it, you will find that this is the only order in the field with the least claim to be called new. For what is Hitler's but the old, old way of subduing all the peoples by force, and ordering all their existences so as to implement one man's single will? All that is new about it is the effect of mechanization implied in the term Total. The will of the ruler, by a sort of inverse gravitation that brings the lowest to the top, is forced to be totally criminal in a way that those of the vilest Cæsars never were—among the gangsters of the modern underworld the toughest guy is king. And that will can be armed with all the power, and operated with the foreseen efficiency, of the most up-to-date internal combustion plant.

But that only has the effect of making it more absolutely the old order than ever. Or—shall we put it—what the old order would have become if it had had the means. Coercion, hierarchy, discipline, uniformity, standardization, control imposed from the top downwards and radiating from the centre outwards—such was the way of Imperial Rome, and of Imperial Spain, and of Imperial France, and now of the Third Reich. When Hitler talks about an order he means not only something arranged, but something commanded—and with him to do the commanding. Which is the original meaning of the word Emperor: the man who gives orders, to one go and he goeth and to another come and he cometh. Only in a mechanized empire he has only to touch the lever or press the button, and the rest follows automatically.

Now any order of that kind the Anglo-Saxon partnership has already repudiated and abjured in the face of the whole world. In the Atlantic Charter we have made it as clear as noonday that the only sort of order we can envisage is one that orders itself, and the more freely the better. Such coercion as we mean to impose is with the object of putting it out of the power of any imperially disposed people to coerce its neighbours.

An order that is not ordered. That is probably the most revolutionary departure ever attempted in the field of international politics. But what is even more startling, is that the conception is so rooted in the thought of all those peoples who by descent or allegiance partake of the English tradition, that it has come to be taken practically for granted, in fact if not in name—for with our incurable indifference to words, we still go on supplying grist to the mills of Goebbels by talking of a British Empire; as if anything answerable to that name were not as dead as Kipling,<sup>1</sup> and as damned as several of its less poetic builders whom it would be tactful not to name.

No man's devil can be his god; nor can we combine our British heritage with any sort of imperial polity, because it is the essence of that heritage to put us above and beyond this old and bankrupt and now deadly way of ordering human affairs.

Is it not now becoming apparent that in this term, British

<sup>1</sup> The imperialist, not the poet. It is tragic that his deplorability in the former should be held to detract from the honour that is his due in the latter capacity.

heritage, is comprehended something of a scope and significance far transcending the national, and to which, except in the doubtful case of Soviet Russia, there is no counterpart anywhere?

Or that we have come to a point at which it is no longer possible to go on taking that heritage blindly for granted? The time is past when we can find our way by instinct and experiment without knowing where we are going. We need to provide ourselves with the largest scale map possible; to ascertain our exact present position, and by what path we have arrived at it, and then to plot out our future course. In other words, we have to become heritage conscious.

Only thus can we convince the world that our existence is an asset and not a liability to it, or reassure those among our own people who are tempted to doubt whether the sacrifice demanded of each and all of them is really worth while. And unless we can attain both of these ends, our hopes of winning either the war or the peace are palpable delusion.

## IV

# HERITAGE OF THOUGHT

## I. SO LONG AS THE HEART BE RIGHT

WHAT is this that we call the British heritage? and on what grounds do we set it up for being of such supreme value, not only to ourselves, but also to the world, as to justify every means we have taken and every sacrifice we can make to preserve it?

We might call it a way of ordering the society of nations, and of society within nations, the idea of which grew to maturity on British soil, but has since expanded from insular to world-wide.

That would be right enough as far as it goes, but there is a point that calls for elucidation. What do we mean when we talk of a "way"? If you had talked to our fathers about a way of ordering anything, they would have probably wanted you to define it in terms of laws and institutions. Nowadays, we should



be more likely to talk about a plan or a blue print, something that you could get down on paper neatly plotted out, with the appropriate diagrams, and of which you can say to your countrymen, or even to mankind at large, " You have only got to carry that out, to the exact time and schedule specified here, and all will be well."

But a very little reflection will be enough to show that when we talk about the British way of ordering things, we mean a great deal more than you can possibly define and limit in this fashion. Nobody has ever codified the English law, or got the British Constitution on to the Statute book; and as for any articles of imperial association, the last word on these is contained in the Statute of Westminster, which lays it down that no full member of the British Commonwealth is bound in law or honour to remain longer, or more closely, in association than it may happen at any time to choose. And as for plans, these are no doubt highly desirable when you are working in a mechanized environment; but there is nothing specially British about planning, and to ask what is the British way of planning is as good as asking what is the British way of anything, so that we are back where we started. Where then does " British " come in? What is it that the Common Law and the Constitution and the Commonwealth of Nations have in common, and share with Dr. Johnson, and Wells Cathedral, and one or two other national products one could name—what is it that imparts to them their distinctive and unique note? Surely it will be agreed that what we really mean when we talk of the British way is a spirit, and that such a way of ordering society is no more reducible to plan or formula than the Christian way—for the reason laid down by Christ, and sedulously ignored by official Christianity, that the spirit bloweth where it listeth and therefore, as is plainly implied, cannot be caught and shelved in neatly labelled bottles of definition.

It will be seen that there can be no question of complying with what is in fact the characteristically British demand for getting down to brass tacks, and casting up an exact account of this British inheritance, as we might of a legacy for assessment to death duty. That is a point on which we have to get our minds clear from the start, because otherwise we shall be committed to chasing will-o'-the-wisps.

It sounds the most common-sense thing in the world to say, "Well, if you have anything to advance about the making of the peace, or the sort of world order you want to see set up after the war, let us have your plan, or your settlement, down in black and white, and then we shall know where we are about it."

But like many other things that seem obvious, it is really a way of missing the point. You can make the subtlest of plans, or frame the most elaborate of institutions—but the decisive test will come not in the making, but in the working. And in the working what really matters is the spirit. Let that be wrong and no plan whatever will go right.

But let the spirit be right, and though it would be too much to say, especially in these days of mechanized precision, that it can be always guaranteed to make good defects of planning and foresight, we have seen, even in the course of this war, to what an extent it is capable of defeating all calculations based on material probabilities. Who could have foreseen the escape of the hopelessly trapped British army after the Belgian capitulation? Not even, it would seem, the Prime Minister himself. Or who would have thought Britain capable of standing up to Hitler alone after the fall of France? Certainly not Hitler.

I do not know how far it may be the experience of other people, but it has certainly been mine, that the longer and more intimately one delves into history, the more does one come to be gripped by a certain high fascination that arises from the discovery that in the long run it is always, and only, the spirit that determines the event. However hard things may seem to go, it is the best side that wins the last battle.

That is the delight and solace of history, the ever repeated confirmation it provides of that boldest of all propositions—when you consider what it implies—that the life is more than meat.

It would need a book in itself, and perhaps many books, to provide chapter and verse for an assumption whose soundness I can only invite the reader to spend as much time as he can afford in testing for himself; and on which, meanwhile, I shall beg his leave to proceed. But if he should prefer that dreary dogma which eliminates spirit altogether, and sees man as the blind shuttlecock of economic forces, I can only reply, most respectfully, with Mal-

volio, that I think nobly of the soul and can in no way approve his opinion.

At least, I hope I shall have made it clear that what I mean by the British heritage is a way of doing things in a certain spirit—a way different from any that has ever been given a trial before in the ordering of civilization.

## 2. AN ENGLISHMAN'S SOUL IS HIS CASTLE

This, that we call our British heritage, is therefore something deeper and more comprehensive than any way of government or system of policy. It is ourselves; and not merely our individual selves, but the self of all ourselves, that has been growing up from the beginning of our island history, and is perhaps even now not fully come of age. Do as we will, and think as we will, we cannot get away from it. When we proudly disclaim the notion of being insular, we are doing so as the insular snobs that we all have a slight tendency to become. When we indulge in our habit of thanking God that we are not as other Englishmen, we are playing a game that, even more than cricket, is so exclusively a native product that hardly any foreigner is capable of seeing the fun, or even the sanity of it.

I believe that Chesterton, giving evidence before some Parliamentary commission, once happened to characterize George III as a German:

"But don't you know," interposed one of the members, slightly scandalized at this aspersion on Royalty, "that George III said that he gloried in the name of Briton?"

"That," retorted Chesterton,<sup>1</sup> "shows that he was a German."

So that we have got to take things, including ourselves, as we find them, even if this involves some rather disquieting reflections for the writer who tries to convince his countrymen that they have more reason for being proud of what God and their fathers have made them—though proportionately humbled by the responsibility thereby thrust upon them—than they had dared to dream. And not only that, but we have also to get to the root of the matter, if we are to comprehend it. For when we talk of a national

<sup>1</sup> In effect. I cannot guarantee verbal accuracy.

way of doing things, we imply that there must be a corresponding way of thinking them, and one in which we shall in all probability be thinking ourselves, at that very moment.

Not that I am trying to insinuate the woolly-minded heresy that the truth itself is different for, or relative to, each people, or even each individual—as if twice two could make three in London and five in Paris. Nor am I trying to make out that there is a truly best way of approaching the truth, and that this is the British way or any other way. One can approach a fixed point from any number of different angles, and one can do it by road or rail or air or even conceivably by burrowing underground like a mole. But though the goal to be attained is fixed and the same for everybody, it is probable that each of us will arrive at it most expeditiously by continuing on the way by which he has started, and in the method which happens to be most natural to him.

And even for those who desire nothing better than to tear themselves up from their insular roots, and graft themselves on to some Continental Culture with a big C. or K., if they can find one alive after the war, it will be just as well to know on what species of organism they are proposing to perform this rather delicate operation.

Now the English way of thought was determined by the reaction of the same spirit to the same environmental conditions as resulted in the English law and the English constitution and whatever may be distinctive of the English way of life.

I have already tried to show how the unique conditions of British insularity have tended to combine receptivity with independence of thought to a degree paralleled nowhere else in the world, a fact that fully explains, if it does not necessarily justify, the bitter reproach that England has never had a culture, in the Continental sense. And, we might add, as long as she remains true to herself, never will have, nor want to have, since what is implied by culture, in this sense, is a sort of team spirit—an agreement all to think in the same way, and in like manner to standardize feeling and touch and taste and, above all, words. A variant of this complaint is that voiced by Matthew Arnold, to the effect that the English are lacking in ideas. What is really implied by this is that they are extremely unwilling—*qua* English

—to get further away from the facts than they can possibly help.

A culture involves a sort of agreed verbal coinage that is constantly being added to, a stock of notions embodied in words that it would be almost an act of bad manners not to accept at their impressed value. Germans of the old school carried this habit to heroic extremes in their metaphysics—get a couple of Herr Professors disputing about the Thing in Itself, or the Phenomenology of the Absolute, and though they might fall on each other with murderous venom, never would they so far transgress the laws of honourable combat as to check up on each other's words, however multisyllabic. A Frenchman will, on the other hand, manipulate his words with such urbane elegance as to palm them off on his audience, and even himself, without the least suspicion of legerdemain.

And that which his critics stigmatize in the Englishman as a lack of culture and aversion from ideas is quite as likely to be the boorishness of the unpopular little man in the audience, who catches the conjuror by the coat tails, and wants to be satisfied that the card handed to him really is the one that he has been invited to choose.

It was an Englishman, the Oxonian, William of Occam, who as early as the fourteenth century, fluttered all the scholastic doves in Europe by proclaiming that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity, or, as we should say now, the more you have to deal with facts, and the less with abstractions and verbal conventions generally, the better.

The razor of Occam, as it was called, has been part of the equipment of every genuine English thinker ever since. And the use of it—to put it with a bluntness that would probably have rather shocked the "Invincible Doctor"—is to cut the cackle. To say this is to incur a considerable danger of cutting one's own fingers, unless it be clearly understood that there is no question of implying that all inheritors of the English tradition think alike, except in the Irish sense of all thinking differently. Which is where they most differ from members of the Latin or Teutonic cultures, with whom thinking itself tends to be much more of a disciplined and standardized activity. And no doubt discipline and conformity to standard have their uses in eliminating the waste and sheer

anarchy that are only too frequently the result of every man being a law unto himself. Even the most stupid Frenchman will never make quite such an exhibition of himself as many much more intelligent Englishmen. But in the English view no possible advantage can compensate for the loss of freedom. For what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

And to say soul, in English, is to imply freedom. As an Englishman prides himself on his house being his castle, so he regards his soul as his invisible castle, of which he, as the captain or castellan, keeps the key. And hence an English culture will never be a pattern imposed, but will grow up from the multiplicity of its individual roots, like some English gardens one knows, that leave on the beholder the impression of being more opulently and harmoniously natural than nature itself.

### 3. SHAM-BROW

What, on the face of it, would seem to be the most offensively repellent of all new word coinages is "highbrow", used as a term of disparagement. One is always rather tempted to retort:

"Well, if you are so proud of possessing the forehead and intelligence of a chimpanzee, that is your look out, but there is no need for you to rub it in by importunate spluttering and chattering at God's image."

And, as a general rule, I still think that such a retort, except for its impoliteness, would be justified, since the disparagement of the cranium is quite frankly, in most cases, intended for what presumably it contains above the vulgar average. But not quite always. For there are times when one feels the need of some such word to describe a certain sort of self-conscious intellectual. My own choice is not high-brow, but sham-brow. To explain what I mean, I would refer to a very cruel and very amusing cartoon that I remember seeing in one of Mr. Max Beerbohm's exhibitions, long ago, of a certain statesman of enormous frontal development and no very distinguished record, who is exhibited as lifting his imposing forehead, which turns out to be a piece of hollow stage property, off a brow of sub-human curvature. And that, when intellectual ceases to be an adjective and becomes a noun, is the

sort of brow whose addition I am always rather inclined to suspect, and test for.

Now it is one mark of its possessor that he is a herd animal whose reactions, down to the minutest detail, are rigidly determined for him, and can be exactly predicted by any experienced student. And hence it is hardly to be wondered at that one of the surest reaction tests for this sort of brow is the hatred, ridicule, and contempt that is always excited beneath it by the stimulus of the word English. For all that is most characteristic of the English mentality is the flat negation of this sort of sham-brow pretentiousness. An Englishman may have brains, but the last thing that he is likely to want is to set up as an Intellectual, especially when this involves putting his mind into a conventional strait waistcoat. Accordingly it becomes a necessary part of this same convention to wage a more Total war on the notion of everything English than Hitler himself, whose hatred, like that of the Kaiser before him, is not altogether unlike that of the proverbial woman scorned, and is frankly compounded with perhaps a major proportion of envious admiration.

Now if it were the whole function of the sham-brow to go about like an inverted Mr. Podsnap proclaiming the superiority of his various spiritual homes overseas to his own country, there would be no need to bother about him. No doubt it is a salutary penance to hear the worst about oneself, even from a bore. But it becomes a more serious matter when this bogus intellectual hierarchy threatens to infect the mentality of the whole nation with its own secondrateness, and thus impart an element of truth, for the first time, to its strictures.

It must be remembered that the present is a time when such a contingency may be less inconceivable than it would under normal circumstances. We have heard a great deal about the economic blizzard that raged between the two wars, but not so much of what, by the same analogy, might be called the mental and spiritual blizzard. And yet this is just as definite, and surely not less alarming a phenomenon of our times. The almost complete extinction of anything that could possibly be called culture in the Totalitarian countries and those which have come within their orbit, which is now almost as good as to say the whole of

Europe, would have been regarded as a fearful and almost a final catastrophe in any age less exclusively given to reckoning in material terms.

Britain has at least held out to the extent of preserving her soul alive. There has been nothing corresponding to the utter black-out of civilized values that has taken place with so many of her neighbours. But with the stimulus of these contacts withdrawn, and in the general lowering of standards that has been practically continuous since the outbreak of the first World War, it is impossible but that she should have suffered severe, and perhaps grievous, loss. Admittedly there is nothing about which it is easier to be deceived than about the invisible currents of one's own time, but I can hardly imagine that anybody would dare to maintain that the output of creative achievement, or the standard of educated thought, has been maintained at anything comparable to the Victorian, or even the Edwardian level. One has only, for the past quarter of a century or so, to have been a sedulous frequenter of any comprehensive library, to have realized the progressive ephemerality of literary output; books are like films that run their season and disappear, and it would seem possible to get away with almost anything between their covers, except what demands concentration. Or if solid work is produced, it is written in esoteric jargon by specialist experts for specializing students—a rule that holds good even for what sets out to be poetry.

Under these conditions, can it be wondered at that there should be some danger of the strong foundations of English thought being undermined? Insular independence and uncompromising pursuit of fact are hardly calculated to have a survival value in a non-stop jazz competition. But the snappy and cynical up-to-dateness that I have ventured to designate as sham-brow is only too well adapted to the new spirit of the age. Its workings are only too evident, and may become a peril more insidious, and not less deadly, than any we have survived from the enemy without. Let the mind be wrong, and nothing will go right, or can possibly, either in war or peace. For if the springs of thought are vitiated, and our men of leading cease to be men of light, what can victory possibly do for us except land us in a catastrophe as total as even defeat could have been?



Now at the present time we are—all of us who are capable of being concerned with more than the hand to mouth routine of a war-time existence—involved in a debate not less momentous than the one which we are waging not with words but with arms. As a great people, with the tradition of self-government implanted in us, scarcely the dullest of us can fail to be conscious of the greater test that awaits us when we have finally disposed of our enemy in the field. Most of us realize how signal was our failure to pass a similar test after our last victory, and what were the consequences of that failure. Even the most thoughtless of us feel that there can be no question of going back to the piping times of slump and unemployment and international anarchy—or at least that if we do, there can be no question of survival for our own or any other sort of civilization, or for our own selves in any state preferable to that of the dead.

And the end of the war may come sooner and more suddenly than any of us has a right to expect. There are some, even, who regard the prospect with a sort of apprehension. For if the victory should come upon us like a thief in the night, and find us unprepared . . .

If it were to come now! If, when we turned on our wireless this evening, or this time next week, and were to hear that the German will to resist had suddenly cracked; that Hitler was out and the great surrender on its way! Should we be ready thankfully and soberly to switch over those energies that we have mobilized for war, without any demobilization of spirit, to the greater task that will confront us; and get down to it without fuss and confusion, as to a problem whose solution we have in mind? Or would it be armistice night over again—and its sequel?

It is the same riddle of the Sphinx that hardly ever, as now, gives a second chance, and never a third. And this time we *have* to get the answer right. We have to thrash it out in common now, so that we may work it out in common then. That is what the great debate is about, and on its outcome depends not whether we shall win the victory over the Axis—that is not a matter for discussion—but whether the winning of it will be worth while.

## 4. BYPASSING SENSE

"All things begin and end", says Blake, in one of those impressive gnomic pronouncements of his, "on Albion's ancient, Druid, rocky shore."

I am afraid I have no claim to rank among those official interpreters of Blake who know so much more about the prose interpretation of his poetry than he ever professed to know himself, but to me it seems as clear as daylight that by Albion's shore he was trying to symbolize something that he divined in the British soul of fundamental significance. You must begin on Albion's shore if you aspire to build Jerusalem or—as he expresses it elsewhere—receive the Lamb of God to dwell in England's green and pleasant bowers. In other words, get your foundations, get your thought right, and your new Jerusalem, if it does not come down from the sky, will at least rise up from the earth, founded upon its native rock. If that be granted, then it will be seen that in this time of critical decision, our surest strength resides in those qualities of mind that form so essential a part of our national heritage and most of all in that uncompromising determination with which almost every English thinker of note has been possessed, to get past words and formulas to the bare facts.

And I do not think that any much more disturbing tendency can be imagined than that of the modern mind, even in England, to relax this determination and to be satisfied to do its thinking in terms not of things, but of verbal abstractions, of conventional value and indeterminate content. That, in itself, sounds rather like such an abstraction, but its meaning will become clear enough if we apply ourselves to consider the abundant material that, even in spite of the paper shortage, is being thrown up in the course of the great debate to which I have already referred. If you go into any bookshop or library you are sure to see a fair sprinkling, among the latest volumes, of those bearing some such title as *An Acceptable Peace*, or *Democracy and the Future*, often over well-known names. That is natural and right at such a time, and it is a healthy symptom that even amid the spate of war-time journalism, such literature should meet a steady demand.

It would be healthier still if that demand could be equally sure of obtaining a supply in good measure of solid and sterling fact, without any alloy or padding of verbiage.

But by the time one has waded through the first few chapters, one is tempted, in confusion and weariness, to conclude that one has been made the victim of a particularly heartless sort of practical joke, in which the Christmas hamper turns out to be all packing and no turkey. Which is no doubt too hasty a judgment, because with great patience and concentration one is often able to arrive at something of substance, and perhaps even of worth, covered up in a corner, and difficult to extract.

The mention of Blake's prophetic writings has suggested what I find to be an unexpectedly apt analogy. I do not know how many admirers of his have addressed themselves to the labour of ploughing solidly through one of the longer specimens—the *Jerusalem*, say, or the *Milton*. If so, I am afraid that reader will experience, after a time, the same sort of hopeless feeling that one has in a nightmare, of being cast adrift in a world peopled by shadows, of imposing and substantial appearance, but which nevertheless are continually changing not only their forms, but even their identities—Enitharmons, Olololons, Hyles, Hands, Theotormons, Orcs, and so forth in endless proliferation, merging into, conflicting with, emanating from, each other in every conceivable permutation and combination. And yet all the time you have the feeling that there is something behind it, something that every now and then bursts out through all this abracadabra of mystification in gushes of pure inspiration.

To this last point I am afraid our analogy will not bear stretching. Not that it would be reasonable to expect ordinary writers on current topics—or any writer for that matter—to display the visionary genius of a Blake. The most we can say is that some sort of definite meaning does quite often seem to be trying to disentangle itself from the kaleidoscopic shadow play of their verbiage. Only they do not, like Blake, choose and christen their phantoms for themselves. For fashions in words are as strict as those dictated by dressmakers to their wealthier patronesses.

Allow me to put the matter to the test by picking up the first of these books that comes to hand—quite literally, for I take it

off the top of the pile by my chair, as I write these words. I am in luck, as it happens to be a particularly good, and perhaps the best specimen of its kind—Professor Laski's *Reflections on the Revolution of our Time*. I open it at random—and believe me or not, really at random—at page 210, and the first sentence on which my eye lights is this:

“I see no merit in international programmes of institutional change which do not deal, from the outset, with the relations of production in such a manner as to make possible renewed access to the economics of expansion.”

I do not know whether the Transatlantic slang-mint has coined some such expression as “brain-reeler”, but it certainly seems to be needed here. If and when the reader has arrived at some notion of what an international programme of institutional change would be like—what nations? and what sort of institutions? and how changed? and by whom?—he finds himself bogged hopelessly by those “relations of production”. Relations of what to what—since even Einstein never conceived of a one member relativity? Of production to itself? Or of producers among themselves? Or can it be that Professor Laski really means the sisters, the cousins, and the aunts, of whatever he means by production? It appears as likely a solution as any other. And if, like myself, the reader decides to give it up, as one of those mysteries that will never be penetrated this side of the grave, and struggles manfully forward to confront the possibility of renewing his own, or production's, or the institutional programme's, or anything else's access to “the economics of expansion”, he has merely escaped from bog to fog. Access to what? I had always thought—and my *Webster* confirms me in thinking—that economics<sup>1</sup> was a science, or at least set out to be one. In my undergraduate days access to economics would have meant going to Professor Marshall's lectures amongst other things. But does Professor Laski really mean to imply that after the war his readers, or the relations of production, or whoever he chooses, will all be free once again to obtain enlightenment from him or any other

<sup>1</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* gives an alternative sense of “condition of a country, as to material prosperity”. But how that could make sense in the present connection is not apparent.

competent authority upon a branch of this alleged science? Or if not—then, in heaven's name what?

You think I am being unfair. Then be good enough to apply the test for yourself to this or any other book of the same class. Open at random, take the first sentence of importance on which your eye may chance to light, and give it as close a shave as you can with William of Occam's razor, or, for that matter, Job's. Are entities being multiplied beyond necessity, or counsel darkened by words without knowledge? Are we dealing with things at all, or phantoms of the mind too vague to be called figments? I have a depressing anticipation of what the answer will be.

I trust I am not lacking in the respect due to so distinguished a scholar as Professor Laski. Anything he has to say would, I am sure, be worth hearing, if he could only succeed in saying it. In this case—though the paragraph is too long to quote—it would seem that he has a serious, though somewhat questionable purpose to fulfil, by throwing cold water on the project of an Anglo-American post-war union. But just as something of real substance seems about to emerge, we are plunged back into verbiage about the contradiction between capitalism and democracy, and unity on a capitalist basis—and once capitalism, or the capitalist system, broods over any discussion, the fog settles down, thick and impenetrable. And it is lucky if any paragraph of this sort of book can escape from this most Protean of all phantom entities.

It used to be a popular exercise for people of more or less importance before the war to inform the world what they would do on the supposition of their being made dictators. I have never been honoured with an invitation to take part, and if I had, I am afraid I might have cut short the pastime by a brief intimation that I should do the only decent thing, and cause myself to be hanged on the most conspicuous tree in my realm as an example to other dictators. But if I might be permitted to allow myself a little fling while the preparations are getting under way, my first ukase would be to prohibit under some horrid penalty—say the reading through in a concentration camp of the complete works of Karl Marx—the use of any word whatever ending in "ism" that could not be found in the first edition of Johnson's *Dictionary*.

But for "capitalism" or the "capitalist system", unless the user were prepared to render an instant and lucid account of his meaning in that particular context, I should harden my heart to some such exemplary frightfulness as forcible feeding with the prose of James Joyce, or the poetry—upgathered in one grim volume, of . . .

But though one may affect to make light of it, this is far from being a joking matter. For where the thought is wrong, all will be wrong; and where confused and flatulent verbiage has become habitual, it is as certain as night follows day that there will be wrong-headed and futile action, and equally certain that such action, national or international, after the war, will lead straight to such a catastrophe as will dwarf even that which ensued from the loss of the former peace.

## 5. UP-TO-DATE MYSTERY CULTS

We are so little accustomed to reckoning of gain or loss in any but material values, that we find it hard to take seriously the idea that this incapacity to think clearly about our own most vital affairs may constitute a veritable, and potentially mortal, disease of modern civilization. And yet it is only what we might expect from a change in our environment so swift and drastic that our minds are unable to adjust themselves to it. Even a child, if you ply it with lessons that its small brain is incapable of taking in, will get drowsy and stupid, and often get into trouble for writing, or answering, what its teacher is moved to characterize as deliberate nonsense. It is the same with all of us, even the oldest. Let the situation complicate itself beyond our capacity to grasp it, and we will instinctively seek to simplify the task of thought by substituting words for things. The proliferation of that habit, on more than a normal scale, it is possible to date from round about the beginning of the last century. But during our own, the process has been speeded up out of all proportion. And of this disease you can diagnose as surely as of a bodily cancer, that unless we can find means of checking and removing it from the system, the patient, who in this case is all of us taken collectively, is not going to survive.

Now the main strength of English thought we have found to reside in a certain quality of solid independence that is part of our insular heritage. This was never more apparent than during the latter half of the seventeenth century, and the whole of the eighteenth. The writers of that time who deal with the various aspects of the ordering of society are as strong as any in the common-sense and grasp of essential fact that are the fruit of this independence. It is the greatest of these—greatly English if ever man was—Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury, whose masterpiece, the *Leviathan*, a not unworthy modern disciple, Professor R. G. Collingwood, describes as “a work of gigantic stature, incredibly overtopping all its successors in political theory from that day to this”.<sup>1</sup>

You may disagree with Hobbes. You may repudiate his main thesis as an apology for dictatorship. But at least you know where you are with him. Every sentence of his, couched in an English that in its naked simplicity is naturally basic, hits the ball in the centre of the bat. Hobbes does not deal in 'isms. He knows nothing of capitalism, or internationalism or distributionism, or socialism, or any other of the abstract bogeys that intrude between our minds and any light that might be shed on our common affairs. You might look in vain through all his works for such a fog-binding sentence as that which I quoted at random from a writer, and such as I might equally well have quoted from any writer, on the affairs of our modern Leviathan or Commonwealth. Which is why, when one has been reduced to headache and despair in the endeavour to extract some modicum of substance from the Book of the current Week, one can lift down from the shelf the great folio volume with the Leviathan engraving for frontispiece, and use it as a tonic, rising richer and refreshed from the perusal of any chapter or paragraph on which one happens to light.

I think you could say almost as much for the lucidity, though not for the genius, of almost any serious treatise on current topics during the period I have selected; and perhaps as much, without any qualification at all, of the famous book, by the Scottish philosopher and man of letters, Adam Smith, from

<sup>1</sup> *The New Leviathan*, p. iv.

which the whole modern science of political economy is said to spring; though it is as different from a modern book on economics as anything that could possibly be imagined, since Smith, whether he was right or wrong, felt himself in enough command of his material to be able to marshal it in beautiful and limpid English, without any 'ism-izing or technical abracadabra. For though he knows to the last detail everything there is to be known about the industry and commerce of his time, he knows nothing about capitalism, or any kindred bogey, even capital usually figuring in his pages under the homely designation of "stock". But then Adam Smith was writing in a still unrevolutionized environment. The first great landmark in the application of power to industry, the invention of the power loom, was nine years after the appearance of his *Wealth of Nations*. It was only when the tall chimneys had begun to spring up like forests, and the justly named wens, or dormitory *ergastula*, to purulate and expand round the factories, that the situation got not only out of hand, but to an even greater extent, beyond the grasp of mind.

This is no place to write the history of the enormous cumulative mystery cult of the so-called social sciences throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. The principle underlying all their changing forms is the same: when things get too complicated for mind to comprehend, substitute a manageable number of words, make your thought-patterns of these, and act accordingly. This principle will be recognized by alienists as underlying most forms of delusional insanity. But it is endemic in human nature, and there can be few of us who would be proof against the temptation of succumbing to it in some measure if pressed hard enough.

The new fashion in thought, or rather in failure to think, was ushered in, significantly enough, during the hard times after Waterloo, by a Radical stockbroker called Ricardo, who, being of Dutch Jewish extraction, was seldom capable of formulating his highly abstract speculations in intelligible English, and consequently was ideally fitted to become the founder of a mystery cult.

The all-powerful middle class, the Gradgrinds and Boun-derbys, rejoiced greatly in their heyday to have had the seal of



infallible science set on their very practical policy of soaking the landlords and keeping down wages in the interest of their own pockets, and the new science soon had its priesthood of authoritative pundits, all of whom were understood to agree that Ricardo had meant this and that Ricardo had been right. The balance of political power long ago shifted enough to get economic law, as endorsed by Gradgrind and Bounderby, condemned, like the ancient law of Ireland, as "a damnable law that is no law, hateful to God and man". But economic science had by that time become too valuable a vested interest to be scrapped, and even if its content had to be completely changed, and its conclusions, in future, kept prudently ambiguous, its terminology remained, and its habit of substituting words for things was only strengthened. As for Ricardo, the academic priesthood even hunted him up in the long unread original, and had no difficulty in satisfying themselves that if he had only been capable of saying what he ought to have meant, he would have been understood to imply something totally different from what he had hitherto been supposed to mean, and that his authority was therefore vindicated beyond all conceivability of refutation. Consequently, as I am credibly informed, the works of Ricardo, or works about the works of Ricardo, are still, as Mr. Belloc would say, to be reverently

noted down and ruminated on  
By every boy in Oxford town who wants to be a don,

at least, in the faculty of economics.

But the posthumous adventures of this amiable speculator on and off 'change—for Ricardo was eminently one of those cravated worthies who in the phrase of their time, "lived respected and died lamented"—were as cosmopolitan as Ricardo himself. Nor is it surprising that it was a member of his own race, Karl Marx, who, adding to his inborn zealotry the desperate thoroughness of his German domicile, should have discovered that Ricardo's technique of simplifying reality was one that could be worked even more effectively for most un-Ricardian ends, and that the Ricardian logic had only to be pushed far enough to justify not only relieving Sir Leicester Dedlock of all his rents, but also

Gradgrind and Bounderby of their entire profits, and exterminating them and everybody like them to round off the job. But such intransigence of logical frightfulness is not for the English mind, even when it is out of its depth. All or nothing was fortunately never an English alternative, and again and again it has been our insular way, when an accepted theory has been felt to go a bit too far, to retain it in theory, while tacitly giving it a miss in practice. That sounds rather muddled, and is muddled; but it has been found to work, which is all your average Englishman bothers about. Though that it will continue to work in an age of mechanical precision by no means follows. But this habit of checking logic by common sense, or allowing the mind below consciousness to act the part of a second chamber, with revising and vetoing powers, to the mind above it, may be pronounced with confidence to have saved the country time and again from positive catastrophe. As, for instance, when the triumphant middle class of the early Victorian epoch had only to have exploited its triumph of the great Reform Bill, consistently with its own "pig philosophy" (as Carlyle called it) and "dismal science", to have precipitated a bloody revolution. But as a matter of fact, even in its heyday, it allowed social reformers like Lord Shaftesbury to defy economic law by legislation calculated to make the whiskers of hundred-per-cent individualists, like Herbert Spencer, stand out like wires.

But unfortunately, since the inevitable cheapening of thought that has resulted from the smattering of literacy imparted in the board schools, even this check has been notably weakened, and the habit of thinking in terms not of things, but of words, not only strengthened, but worsened. For the Gradgrinds and Bounderbys were practical men who knew very well what they wanted—which usually meant as much as they could get; who ran words to death in their economics as they worked children to death in their factories, for sound business reasons, and did at least have some notion in their minds, even if it were a very distorted one, of what they were talking about. But to judge by a very large part of what is spoken and written on current affairs to-day, even that has ceased to be necessary. People are apt to lash themselves up into a state of the utmost excitement and team loyalty

about words that have never been more to them than longwinded battle-cries, with no more intelligible content than the *Rah! rah! rah!* of a college yell.

And this, if we are considering our English heritage and the means of preserving it, is a development that cannot be ignored. For if that habit should finally prevail, "English heritage" would become just a couple more of those words without knowledge that darken counsel. We should have ceased to be English in spirit, and before long would have ceased to be English at all, in the sense of a free people—even if, having no more souls to damn, a proportion of survivors, called English, were left with bodies to kick, or to starve.

## 6. WORDS! WORDS! WORDS!

Having said that much, one can only wait for the healthy English retort, which is to the effect that so startling a proposition is plainly exaggerated—things cannot be as bad as that. To which the only answer is—test and see. For there is no lack of material to judge by.

Take one or two samples of the sort of verbal stimulus by which people in the mass, to-day, are emotionally moved. And consider what, if anything, such words convey to the person who uses them more definite than the colour red to the proverbial bull.

Commonly they are abstract notions, and confused ones at that, visualized in the form of persons. Typical of these is something or somebody called International Finance. One is constantly hearing it asserted in argument or invective that this formidable entity has done, or is responsible for, or is plotting to do, or must be prevented from doing, this, that, or the other undesirable thing.

Now finance being, in plain English, the way or science of managing money, is obviously incapable of doing or plotting anything. So that it is a natural, if not exactly a popular question to ask of anyone who hints darkly at his, or its, machinations:

"And who is your cosmopolitan friend?"

You will be more fortunate than I have ever been if you succeed in getting any more illuminating answer than:

"Hell! Don't you know what one means by International Finance?"

Well, in this connection, no. No more does your questioner. Nor, as far as I am aware, is there any treatise or document extant in which this sinister identity is disclosed. Is it an alliance, or a syndicate, or a Sanhedrim? By whom are its objects fixed or its decisions taken? By what means are these decisions, once taken, put into effect? Nobody knows—or if anybody does know, he is very careful not to tell.

That is one instance of the way in which our picture of reality may be distorted, and our sense of it blunted. And lest anyone should think this a trivial matter, let him ask himself why, and to what end, such distortion comes to figure so largely in the Nazi propaganda technique, in which Finance is equated with Jews, and Britain "in reality", as the Führer says, becomes "the instrument of international Jewry". But instances are so many that one could go on piling them up *ad infinitum*. The great family of 'Ism, perpetually reinforced until the repetition of it—adventurism, distributionalism, regionalism, Beveridgeism—sounds like the buzzing of bees in innumerable bonnets, provides the most heinous offenders, including such incurable specimens as socialism, which, as Voltaire said of the Prophet Habakkuk, would appear to be *capable de tout* in the way of meaning—which is probably what that cynical old Whig magnate, Sir William Harcourt, had at the back of his mind when he declared that "we are all socialists now".

Though even socialism is not quite such a slippery and mischievous customer as its opposite number "capitalism", *alias* the Capitalist System, presumably on the principle of *lucus a non lucendo*, since about the one admittedly common feature of all the various states of society that have been described, and denounced, as capitalist, is that they are governed by no system at all—that being a main respect in which they are alleged to differ from socialism.

Though the form of it is not original, perhaps I may be allowed to supply what I believe more nearly approximates to a lucid

and comprehensive definition than any I have yet come across, namely:

*Socialism is my 'ism and capitalism is your 'ism,*

though, to be sure, there are still a few unrepentant and post-humous Victorians who would put it the other way about.

Socialism may, and very often does, mean no more than a change over of management of such public utilities as railways, mines, and electricity supply, from company's officials to government or municipal officials; it may, though again it may not, include bilking the existing shareholders in such concerns, *qua* capitalists, of their property; it may amount to no more, in practice, than a determination to spend all and more than can be squeezed out of the taxpayer in the supposed interests of the wage-earner; according to so world-famous an authority as Mr. Bernard Shaw it means "equality of income or nothing", which is a good deal more than communism has ever meant in practice; while occasionally it amounts to nothing much more definite than the sort of pub-crawling heartiness which to a certain type of publicists is supposed to be a solvent of all class distinctions. You pay your money—or more likely make somebody else pay his—and you take your choice.

As for capitalism, that would appear to mean practically every social phenomenon that has been ever alleged to have occurred between the Reformation in the sixteenth century, and the October Revolution in the twentieth—and it is beginning to be freely asserted that even in Russia it was only kicked out of the front door by Lenin to be smuggled in at the back by Stalin.

It would be beside the point to argue that if we could only arrive at it, these words would prove each to have some one absolute and correct meaning. What alone matters is that to the people who actually employ them, and whose whole vision of reality is coloured and distorted by them, they may bear practically any meaning, or none at all. Also that when this great debate, on whose outcome our whole future welfare, and even existence depends, resolves itself into a pursuit of these and similar will-o'-the-wisps, our fate is likely to be that of the blind led by the blind.

And yet who, that has followed the course of events in the past generation, can deny that even here, in matter-of-fact Britain, this habit has been gaining on us at an appalling rate, and that of checking up words by things proportionately weakened?

And once our attention gets bespoken by these meaningless words, which do not even possess the comparative honesty of good, solid lies, how can we possibly have an eye for the realities that we have got to see clearly and master promptly, before they master and destroy us?

I do not say that things have gone so far in this direction here as to destroy the foundations of that common-sense and fact-sense that have their origins so deep in the past, and have on so many occasions of crisis proved to be the saving strength of the British character. Were that so, it would be mere waste of breath to write about it. How can you appeal to minds that have nothing in them to appeal to? We should all be doomed together; and there would be nothing to be done about it.

But we know that this is not so. We know, and the whole world knows, that these foundations stand. The strength of the British character has never been more gloriously vindicated than in these great days through which it has been our honour to live. To that our enemies themselves are witnesses, since the last desperate appeal of their propagandists to their own people would appear to consist in exhortations to them to take it like the British.

We have those foundations to build upon, if we can only get down to them, and keep on them. But that is just the question—can we? For we must remember that there is a very different story to be told of a longer period than that which has elapsed from the awakening of 1940 till now; a story that, except in the light of the sequel, might have been taken for that of a people too incurably frivolous and degenerate to interest itself in maintaining the peace it had sacrificed a million lives to obtain, or even to make it worth maintaining by putting its own domestic house in order; a people, it might have been added, that even when it was dragged into war, could not, until all appeared lost, summon up the heart to wage it in such a way as to annoy the enemy.

You can build your house on a rock, or build it on the sand, but nothing can be more fatal than to try to compromise between the two by having two houses, and choosing the one on the sand for your habitual residence, trusting that when the floods come you will have time to pack up and retire for duration to your austere little cottage on the rock. Because, with the release of the floods pent up behind the huge dams of modern life, there will be no time to change house. Everything not on the rock will be swept away at the first rush.

## 7. THROUGH FOG TO FETTERS

Even though it may go against our native grain to admit it, the word English, to-day, has a proud sound. For if we, in this hour, have not cause to glory in our common heritage—what people ever had? But there is all the difference in the world between being proud and being satisfied. And to be satisfied with what we have achieved up to the present, would be as good as to wipe it off the slate. For the most that we have done, or can possibly do, in this war, is not good enough to go on with. Still less, what we are. Not good enough even to keep us in being as a free people.

That is a plain, practical proposition that can be tried out in the light of facts. The inter-war mind was plainly not up to its work. It was utterly incapable of meeting the unprecedented demands made on it by the new order of reality with which it had to cope. It was incapable, or afraid, of looking this reality in the face and trying to grasp what these demands were. It could only turn aside to the great "*As if*", which is the easy road to suicide, by a tacit agreement to carry on *as if* the present reality did not exist, and *as if* some much simpler and more manageable substitute for reality did exist.

But nothing can be more certain than that the reality with which we shall be confronted after this war will make even greater demands on our powers of mind and spirit than that to which we so signally failed to adapt ourselves after the last. And it would seem to be as much a matter of certainty as the rising of the sun to-morrow, that unless we can summon up a radically different

mind and spirit in face of this second post-war reality, we shall be doomed to a breakdown even more catastrophic than the former. And when we consider by what a hairsbreadth then we escaped irretrievable disaster, is it to be believed that the second breakdown, if it comes, will prove anything but final?

But, it will be urged, a *new* mind and spirit, housed in some 40 million bodies, is against the order of nature. These changes demand time, and the passing of generations, to establish themselves. Perhaps so, though—look at Russia!—perhaps not quite so obviously as you assume. I am not disputing the point. For the word that I used was not “new” but “different”. Different from the mind and spirit of those two decades between the wars. But not so different from the spirit that welled up spontaneously in face of mortal crisis, recognized as such. To be that which we have it in us to be, to justify our name of a great and understanding people, is not new. What is new is the attitude of shrinking from reality, and taking refuge from it in our own imaginations and all sorts of verbal nonsense that we have not even got to the point of imagining. That was a thing never charged, even by his detractors, against the old legendary John Bull, who, with all his alleged faults of greed and pig-headedness and self-righteousness, was admitted to be in every sense of the word a solid man and a practical—a damned sight too practical, some of his critics would have said.

Was there ever a time in our history, except that between the two wars, when even educated people would have fallen for the so-called Douglas credit scheme? And yet there was a time when the craze for this precious panacea was as catching as the influenza. One never seemed able to get away from it. And yet, as far as my experience goes, there was no single person among all its converts and apostles, who was capable of giving a lucid explanation of what the Douglas credit scheme exactly was, except that it was some wonderful patent way of making everyone rich by manipulating credit, and that it was a matter of simple faith and booking to present every member of the community with an income of five pounds—I think the usual figure was, though it might equally well have been a million while you were about it—a month, and moreover that it was possible to do this without in



any way inflating the currency, because by a principle analogous to that of Einstein, the faster you could make your medium circulate, the more value you could put into each unit of it.

I am sorry if I have misrepresented Douglassocialcreditism—if that is the right word—by any careless lapse into lucidity, in the endeavour to rationalize an abacadabra that is constant in nothing except in obscurity. It may even be—for who can tell?—that Major Douglas actually had the secret of the philosopher's stone; but if so, like his medieval forerunners, he failed, or declined, to communicate it to his disciples. The only occasion his principles ever did get a chance to be put into practice was when the simple folk of the Canadian Province of Alberta installed a government pledged to them, and sat back waiting for the golden shower to fall into their laps. But alas, the oracle went forth from the Founder that these were not pure orthodox Douglasites, but heretics—who nevertheless proceeded to implement their version of the scheme by the simple expedient of defaulting on as many of their debts as they could, until the Dominion Government intervened to prevent them playing further ducks and drakes of a similar kind; and as far as I am aware, the good people of Alberta are still waiting for their Fortunatus purse to yield its first cent of a dividend.

The scheme in itself has neither more nor less claim to be remembered than those, if any, of the British Israelites or the augurs of the Great Pyramid. It is the public reaction to it that is so disturbingly symptomatic. I doubt whether in any age except our own, any considerable number of people could have been worked up into a state of militant fanaticism about what, if there had been anything in it at all, would have been a highly technical project in the way of financial adjustment, on which they were in no better position to pronounce a judgment than on the calculations of Einstein; or that they could have actually formed themselves into a sort of crusading host and, instead of taking the Cross, dressed themselves up in shirts of symbolic, and certainly appropriate, green. The whole thing so palpably refuses to make sense! And it sets one wondering what patterned shirts will be designed for the Knights of the Holy Calculus, or the Order of Planck's Constant Brethren.

But seriously—for in all conscience the matter is serious enough—is it not notorious that such fog and fury of the mind has in every case of its triumph been the pre-conditioning factor of the Total Tyranny? No wonder men like Hitler have been masters in the art of generating it! “Therefore fall the people unto them, and thereout suck they no small advantage.” No shirt, no fetters!

I remember reading the account of a speech by Hitler or some other Nazi leader that exactly illustrates this. Between gusts of delirious applause the speaker bawled somewhat as follows:<sup>1</sup>

“We do not advocate a capitalist economics or a communist economics, but a National Socialist Economics (*ja! ja! heil! heil!*); not a state agriculture, nor an estate agriculture, but a National Socialist Agriculture . . .” and so on through a crescendo of sublimated alternatives.

Now we had not descended to that level here in Britain even in the worst trough of the inter-war depression. Had it been so, nothing could have saved us from going the way of France. But there were times when we were slipping perilously down towards it, and with an acceleration that threatened to get out of control. And though we did, in the event, prove capable of pulling ourselves up sharp, and resting true to our ancient form, we have another post-war period lying ahead, and no reason for assurance that once the tension of immediate danger is relaxed, the descent will not start again; or that soul-destroying habits that are even now no more than just below the surface, and not always even below it, can be guaranteed against resurrection in greater strength than ever by reason of their long incubation.

<sup>1</sup> I am sorry that I did not take a note of the source.

## V

## QUISLINGS OF DISINHERITANCE

## I. WHAT MUST WE BECOME?

THERE is no name so abhorred by the normal Englishman as that of pessimist. Fix that on a writer, and it will be enough to hang him out of hand—or at any rate to pulp him out of press. And it is difficult to bring home to your critics that optimism and pessimism are no more than the positive and negative aspects of the selfsame delusion, to the effect that the whole future, as well as what I think of it, and what you think of me for thinking it, is mechanically pre-determined in advance; and that consequently it cannot make the slightest difference what you or I or anyone else thinks that he thinks about it, or imagines that he can do about it, since, despite appearances to the contrary, we differ in no essential respect from walking machines. Though, even on this showing, optimism and pessimism signify nothing except the way we happen to be working at the moment: if your engine is racing nineteen to the dozen, result—optimism; if, on the other hand, it is missing, or clogged, result—pessimism. The facts have nothing to do with it. And if that is not absurd—what in God's universe ever was or could be? And yet on no other showing do optimism and pessimism make sense at all, or even intelligible nonsense.

I am afraid that this is a case where I have sometimes felt tempted to violate my own rule, and add to the number of those 'isms whose multiplication has already grown to be the besetting nuisance of our language. But for these two giant impostors, optimism and pessimism, it does seem a pity that there should be no nameable alternative, such as, let us say, *potentialism*, or the belief that things that have not happened yet, *may* happen either way—and that *which* way depends on us. All we can say is that the force of external circumstances, and the impulsion of our own upgathered pasts, may impart to the future certain ten-

dencies to turn out well or ill; and that unless we can check certain of these tendencies, or perhaps even effect a complete conversion of our whole way of life, we shall come to inevitable grief. The pessimist says that we will anyhow, and that there is nothing we can do about it; the optimist that all is bound to right itself somehow, and that there is no need to do anything about it—but the potentialist says that it must and shall come right, and buckles to and does what has to be done to make it so. And what applies to men applies equally to nations. No great people is content to speculate on whether the future is going to turn out well or ill: its mood is not indicative, but imperative. Britain, in the world's judgment, may be doomed to have her neck wrung like a chicken in a matter of weeks. But if Britain dooms it otherwise, what does it matter? The imperative is master of the indicative.

It is therefore in no way pessimistic to point out that the same fatal tendency of mind to revert to its pre-war level, that robbed us of the fruits of our last victory, is as ready to come into play after this war; and that if it is allowed to do so, the only difference from last time will be that instead of bringing us to the edge of the abyss, the overwhelming probability is that it will impel us over it. Far from being a cause for despair, this is to be regarded in the light of a challenge. It states the conditions of the task we have to perform. If they are hard conditions, they are no harder than those with which the present Prime Minister confronted us on his assumption of office. Nothing could have been more ruthlessly frank than his exposition—many, many long months . . . but the words are burning in all our memories. Britain did not talk of pessimism then; she hardly talked at all, there was too much to do. And when those months are ended, and the impossible achieved, she will be more tired than ever before, more humanly eager to settle down to the long holiday she will have so nobly earned. But there will open before her a vista not of months, but of many, many long years, during which it will be death to relax—and it will merely be a question of switching over without pause from one task to another, less spectacular, but not less exacting, of self-conquest. Those tendencies that are merely latent below the surface now will at all costs have to

go on being repressed, until they are completely purged and replaced by a new habit of mind and soul bearing fruit in a new social order, and a new world order, adapted to the conditions of the new age, and capable of profiting from them.

If that can be fairly put before the ordinary Englishman, in such a way as to satisfy him that it is true, I do not think that he will fail to do his part. But the intelligence will be anything but welcome, and as long as there is the least loophole for doubt he will avail himself of it. And you are not going to convince him by anything but the most explicit statement of what you are demanding that he should do. These habits and tendencies that are latent below the surface—by what shall we recognize them? In what form are they chiefly liable to manifest themselves? To that question we have now to address ourselves.

## 2. OBSCENE RESURRECTION

We can best judge of the present in the light of the past. But the past reproduces itself only in principle, never in detail. Things never happen in quite the same way twice. We can see this most conspicuously in war. Literally millions of lives have been sacrificed to the British habit of always starting every new war in the style of the last, until we have had it sweated out of us in blood—the Crimean where we left off in the Peninsula; the South African where we left off in the Crimea; and this war with another B.E.F. in Flanders, and in due course, another retreat that somehow failed to reproduce the Mons-Marne pattern. But on a larger view we might say that the more the style has been out-dated, the more the spirit has preserved its essential constancy, or perhaps it would be better to say, its vital continuity. And if we had only been capable of learning from the spirit of the past, instead of aping its form, it would have been better for us.

Now suppose it to be agreed that our supreme peril is lest we should let a new peace slip through our fingers as we did the last, surely our first business is to profit to the uttermost by that experience. But how? For there is a right way and a wrong way of doing all things. And the way we are only too likely to take in practice, is to put ourselves back where we were in 1919, and

cast up an account of all the things that were left undone then that ought to have been done, and were done that ought not to have been done, and then give foolproof instructions to our new rulers to do the former and avoid the latter. In other words to win this peace in terms of the last. Or—to take a parable from the cricket field—to go to the wicket for one's second innings with the fixed pre-determination to play the stroke that one ought to have played at the ball off which one was caught for a duck in the last. But no two balls are ever quite the same, and to play what would have been the correct stroke at the one before, may only precipitate a second disaster. But the batsman who diligently takes stock of his past failures to discover what bad habit he may have developed, and practises unremittingly to break himself of it, may prove to have been thinking to some purpose.

Cast back your mind to those years of the last world war, and reflect that it was during these years that the seeds of the great failure to win the peace must have been sown. We are in a better position now, than we were at the time, to realize what was really taking place below the patriotic and martial surface of our national life. We have for instance such horribly depressing revelations—the more so because the effect appears to be completely unintentional—as Lord Beaverbrook's two fascinating volumes about the inner workings of wartime politics. What this most candid and knowledgeable of witnesses has to tell us, is that at this time, when the whole fate of our commonwealth and civilization was trembling in the balance, when only the simple heroism of men tried almost beyond endurance stood between us and ruin—even then, behind the front, another war of longer standing was going on with unrelaxed vigour, the petty and sordid skin game of the party bosses and the party machines, the sort of thing that is discussed in political clubs by those in the know. Even when there was a façade of national unity in face of the common peril, we learn that the formation of a new government was by bargaining as close and intrigue as deep as any in peace time, and that no consideration of the King's service or national welfare could be admitted to justify any group or faction in conceding the smallest crumb or morsel of the loaves and fishes of office. If some vital office was conceded to a Tory Taper, why then, a

Liberal Tadpole must be installed in some other equally vital, and if the sacrifice of practical efficiency to practical politics should involve that of a few thousand unknown soldiers—well, one knows that in the game of beggar-my-neighbour the sacrifice of a few common cards, or “rubbish” as we used to call them in the nursery, is neither here nor there.

But that is only one, and not the most important aspect, of something much wider and deeper than what those in the know mean by politics. For what we hardly had the heart to suspect then, has become in the light of events only too plain. The enormous upheaval on the surface of our national life during those four years of the first World War, had produced scarcely the least real change of heart in any single quarter. Pre-war was only waiting to resurrect as Post-war. And we have but to recall the atmosphere of those hectic pre-war years of George V's reign to realize what that implies. For I suppose there was no time in the whole of our history in which the base and sectional passions that war against the soul of a nation were fomented and let loose with such entire absence of restraint. That spirit of compromise and over-riding patriotism that has—and not altogether without reason—been attributed to the British nature, appeared to be entirely in abeyance. Liberals breathing fire and slaughter against the “rebels” of Protestant Ulster; Tory commanders undermining the discipline of the army and organizing civil war in face of what they well knew to be the imminent menace of European war; strike after strike paralysing essential industries, and a general strike being busily engineered; the sedulously advertised futilities, and worse, of the plutocratic “smart set”; and what now seems the almost incredible outbreak—to which we should have to go to the middle ages for a parallel—of sex-starved fanaticism that marked the suffragette agitation.

I can so well remember the feeling of almost exhilaration that came over so many of us, even in those first terrible weeks of the war when all the foundations of our world seemed collapsing; a feeling so well voiced by young Rupert Brooke:

“Now God be thanked who has matched us with His hour!”

It seemed then as if all those evil nightmares had been dis-

solved forever, now that England had found her true self in the fire of adversity. We could not, and we would not, have dared to dream that, except for the suffragettes, who could hardly have resurrected in the same form *with* the vote, none of these evil things were killed at all, but were as alive as ever; and that having learnt nothing and forgotten nothing, their authors were merely waiting for the bugles to sound dismiss, to take up their pre-war activities at the precise point they had dropped them, and with a full determination to make up for arrears.

We know how this happened. We know how it began to happen with the first wild orgie of unrestraint that was the national reaction to victory, and the transformation of statesmen into prostitutes of the hustings, content to win an election by losing the peace; how the new world safe for democracy, the new Britain fit for heroes to live in, never even began to materialize; how each one of the miserable pre-war skin games of class and faction was resumed with a more exacerbated rigour than ever on the pre-war lines; and how suspicion ripened to certainty, that all the heroism and sacrifice of the war might as well have gone down the sewer, for any change of heart or new way of life that they might have effected.

But if the bad old things had not been alive beneath the surface during the war, they would never have come up above the surface, the moment it ceased, to resume control.

And now the emergence above it of such obscene phenomena as the sort of perambulating circuses that go about touring the constituencies with the object of exploiting war-weariness for votes, and the measure of popular success accorded to their clowning, suggests that the bad old things are very much alive still, and preparing to resume sway as before—and rather worse than before.

And—far worse both in its immediate effects and its ultimate implications—the organized and only too successful attempts to incite certain sections of key workers to corner their own services, and levy open blackmail on the community in the hour of its direst need; conduct of a sort that—if anything similar could be only plausibly imputed to a capitalist profiteer—would be enough to get him lynched in the street. If this spirit can so far prevail



during the war, as to imperil vital operations and the lives of perhaps thousands of comrades in the field—what have we not to expect after the peace!

### 3. LEFT! RIGHT!

We must then at least be prepared to find that what happened during the last war is happening now, and that those habits and tendencies that render the memory of the pre-war period like that of a nightmare, are with us now, potentially as strong as ever, though in a state of partial abeyance for as long as the war lasts.

But it does not follow that the form in which these things manifest themselves to-day must needs be identical with that of 1914-1918. The habits themselves may have changed in that time, or their emphasis may have shifted. The tremendous crisis through which we have passed, that had no parallel during that war, has produced a more comprehensive union of all parties in the service of the nation than there could have been any question of then. And in any case, party warfare on the traditional lines has lost a good deal of its significance, and though the machines are kept working as hard as ever, the real cleavage is tending to become rather different from the ostensible one.

For the extraordinary mix up of parties during the inter-war years, and particularly since the Great Slump, has caused the traditional team loyalties to lose a great deal of their significance. The once mighty Liberal party has split into so many factions, and has so long ceased to be associated with any recognizable principle, liberal or otherwise, that it is difficult to see how, in any foreseeable time, it can hope to do more than barter its services by sections to the highest bidder, and speculate on holding a precarious balance, after some narrowly contested election, between Government and Opposition. Even the name of Labour has ceased to signify what it did, since the split of 1931 and the irrecoverable loss of prestige suffered by the party as the result of its overwhelming repudiation by the electorate. And the prestige even of the Conservative party, in spite of its record majorities, and its easy dominance of the electorate (except for two brief and partial setbacks) during the entire inter-war period, has also suffered to an undeterminable extent from what the ordinary

man believes to be the way in which it let the country down by its failure to honour its own principles, by taking the people into its confidence and standing up to the combined forces of the Dictators and the Opposition in the matter of rearmament. Though how far this sacrifice of patriotism to politics will be remembered against it after a fresh start under the leadership of Winston Churchill, depends most on itself. The party game, on the old three cornered lines, is certainly not off, nor likely to be as long as the party machines, and their appertaining funds, remain in being. But it has ceased to command the monopoly of interest that it did in the old days. And among politically conscious people, within an ever widening circle during the nineteen-thirties, it was as if a new and simpler picture had been superimposed on the old, one of vaster proportions and bolder lines. More and more, instead of the national and traditional names, the contest was coming to be viewed as a mere local phase of a world-wide war of Left *versus* Right.

Such super-national alignments go against the grain of the British—and most of all the English—nature. The last thing any average Englishman desires is to take his politics from foreigners. So to make the idea work, the most effective way was to impress vividly on the popular imagination the picture of the opposing team recognizably identified with sinister foreign influences of the opposite hand. As was done most effectively by the Conservative use of the Zinovieff letter (whether or not we accept the still unproven allegation of its forgery is beside the point) in the 1924 election, to identify the Labour cause with that of Bolshevism; and in the pertinacious attempt of Labour to return the compliment throughout the nineteen-thirties, by propagating the legend of the National Government and its leaders being in active sympathy, or league, with Fascism.

Now here we have a leading instance of that modern tendency, on which I have already remarked, to avert the mind's eye from reality, and after substituting a dream picture more or less distinctly conceived, to talk and act as if that were the real thing. As a matter of easily ascertainable fact, the chiefs of the Labour party in the pre-war decade were afraid of nothing so much as the subversive activities of the Communists inside it, well knowing

what their own fate would be if they ever found themselves at the mercy of these formidable comrades; and the result of certain gingerly flirtations with Moscow up to the time of the General Strike had been to implant in the solid aristocracy of Trade Unionism an unspoken conviction, that to keep out the Communists was a more important matter than to down the Tories; and that though one might at a pinch come to terms with the latter, the longest of barge-poles was not long enough for touching the former.

That much will hardly be disputed, for the official Tory propaganda cannot be said to have concentrated with any emphasis on the identification of Labour with Bolshevism—though as a matter of pure tactics this would appear to have been its most promising lead. But it was far otherwise with the Labour propaganda which, here at least taking its cue from an avowedly Communist intelligentsia, laboured with considerable success to propagate the myth that their political opponents were (with a capital) Right, and that Right meant Fascism. For some reason, Neville Chamberlain, of all people, was pilloried as Fascist in chief—a sort of Super-Oswald-Mosley.

Now this particular myth is important because it is very much alive to-day; even in spite of the war, it is perpetually cropping up in one form or another, and after the war it is more likely than anything else to shatter any unity of purpose or spirit achieved during it, and let loose a Total faction fight of Left against Right, in the course of which all the fruits of victory will be thrown away, and the way cleared for the coming of the third and finishing World War.

It is therefore very much to our purpose to know just how much, if any, truth there is behind this idea of a vast Fascist Conspiracy in which most, if not all, of the King's ministers from 1931 to the start of the war were aiding and abetting. And I think that the least serious inquiry into the real facts will show that this is an even more unpalatable cock and bull story than that of their Labour opposite numbers being the Quislings of Bolshevism.

No doubt there was a tendency in certain quarters to a Platonic hero-worship of Mussolini, especially on the part of tourists who

had discovered, before his advent to power, that the one punctual and efficient service on which you could reasonably count at the hands of his countrymen was that performed, with entire impunity, by the hands of pickpockets, and who were not unnaturally prepared to welcome the strong man who could make Italy a tolerable country for a visitor to sojourn in. And besides, there was a certain glamour about the part for which the Duce had cast himself, that contrasted not unpleasantly with the drabness of politicians at home. But that did not mean that any considerable section of Englishmen wanted to have a Duce of their own, or to import Fascism into England. A few hopeful people who tried to organize themselves under the name of British Fascists during the 'twenties, and were ill-advised enough to charge their buttons with its initials, were laughed out of existence.

A rather more serious attempt was that made by Sir Oswald Mosley, who, with youth, riches, social influence, and a *flair* for mob oratory, seemed plainly marked out for what Mr. Belloc's Aged Duke might have designated as "the Next Prime Minister but Three", but who, in his frantic hurry to assert himself in some even more dazzling capacity—no matter what—displayed a faculty, almost amounting to genius, for plunging from one failure to another, until at last the spectacle of Mussolini's success seems to have inspired him with the idea of how easy it would be, by a simple process of imitation, to install himself as the Divine Cæsar of a presumably acquiescent and hero-worshipping Britain. Granted the simple assumption that conditions in Britain were identical with those in Italy! If anyone could be simple enough to grant it! But Sir Oswald would seem to have been. Or more likely he never thought coherently about it at all; nothing in his recorded utterances warrants us in believing him equal to such an effort.

Even a modicum of reading might have preserved him from his crowning blunder. In 1928 the book about which everybody was talking was Mr. Aldous Huxley's *Point Counterpoint*. There one of the leading characters is a melodramatic personage who sets himself to solve exactly the same problem to which Sir Oswald was to address himself three years later, of creating a British Fascist army with himself as its head. Only Mr. Huxley,

though the idea is certainly abhorrent to him, is too great an artist not to give his devil his due, and allow him to attempt the impossible in the least impossible way. So what does his man do but go all out in appealing to the sentimental and romantic element in the English nature; he dresses his followers up in the green livery of Robin Hood, he calls them the order of British Freemen, is continually harping on the note of Merrie England, and poses as a restorer of ancient liberties. That, if there was a way to do it, would be the way. But it was not the Mosley way. Every floater that it was possible to perpetrate he seems to have discovered. From the first, he committed himself to the slavish and flaunting imitation of the foreign model, even down to making his henchmen ridiculous in the garb of the Fascisti—for especially after the war, the common Englishman was apt to regard the heroic Italians as rather figures of fun. Next, there was imported from the Continent that foul thing called Anti-Semitism, which itself was enough to turn any healthy English stomach. But as if this were not enough, the new movement, when Hitler came along, must needs fall for him too, and draw to itself all the mounting odium and horror with which Englishmen greeted the devilries perpetrated under his auspices. The climax came when, at a meeting at Olympia, the Black army staged a demonstration, imperfect but sufficient, of storm troop methods on British soil. Thenceforth, by all but an insignificant minority of his countrymen, Mosley's movement was regarded in the light of an intolerable nuisance that was not even funny. Nowhere did it achieve the smallest success. In no constituency would there have been even a freak chance for one of its candidates. The idea that it was supported by the Government or any other party would be too fantastic to mention, were it not constantly suggested. British Fascism was, in fact, as openly hostile to the Government as to the Opposition, and the sole effect that any one of its candidates could possibly have produced, would have been to split the Government vote in some narrowly contested seat. There had been a time when the late Lord Rothermere had tried the effect of booming it in his press, but he was not long in tumbling to the fact that not even competitions about the most beautiful Black-shirt girl could make British Fascism a seller, and he dropped it

like a hot brick, even quicker than he had taken it up. As for the National Government, whatever else may be charged against it, nothing could have been more effective than the way in which it extracted whatever sting there might have been left in the movement, by an Act prohibiting political uniforms. For whose blood will warm or run cold at the sight of a few weedy young hooligans in suits of mass-produced shoddy?

There was, in fact, only one party in the state to whom the activities of Mosley's merry men were an unmitigated blessing, and that was the very party it professed to oppose, that of the almost equally powerless and insignificant Communists. The Blacks and the Reds—in spite of a chronic and mutual vendetta resembling that of a couple of race gangs—constituted between them a most effective mutual advertisement society. Everywhere the walls were chalked with such legends as,

#### STOP MOSLY ON SUNDY

and naturally the popular press, always ready to stunt any suggestion of sensational violence, played into both their hands, so that the impression was created in the minds of ordinary people that something like a subterranean civil war was being waged in our cities, between vast and sinister forces, one or both of which had already overthrown free civilization on the greater part of the Continent—the war of Right *versus* Left. Were conditions ever more perfectly set for the birth of a myth?

As the party game is played nowadays, it would be too much to expect that one or more of the contending factions should omit to seize the opportunity of tarring its opponent with the brush of unpopularity. It was Labour that was the quickest off the mark, and blandly ignoring the fact that the Conservatives had metaphorically debagged, or at least deshirted, the Black legionaries, they interpreted or distorted everything that was done, or supposed to be done, by the ministers or their supporters, so as to fit in with the idea of the great Fascist conspiracy. The mere refusal to plunge the country into a war that it would have had to fight without arms or allies on behalf of Reds in Spain,<sup>1</sup> or Blacks

<sup>1</sup> And the least study of history might have suggested the sort of gratitude a proud Spaniard is likely to accord to anyone who dares put upon him the affront of an obligation.

in Abyssinia, or, on an impulse of mad knight-errantry—how mad we ought to know by this time—tilting at Japanese wind-mills at the other end of the world, was brought up as proof positive of the most diabolical motives. Sir Oswald himself, one would have gathered, was nothing like as thick with the Dictators as poor, peace-loving Neville Chamberlain!

There is no evidence yet forthcoming that this Left propaganda was actually subsidized by the Dictators, but if it had been, it would have been a move of the utmost brilliance, coming as near as anything could to giving the whole game into their hands. For so far had the divorce from reality proceeded, that it was the Anti-Fascists who were straining every nerve to make the Axis triumph sure by delivering up the country, practically unarmed, to the mercy of its chiefs. It was only necessary to proclaim from every soap box that the ministers, if they were trusted with arms in their hands, would promptly rush to the support of their friends in shirts, to make it clear that it was imperative to hamstring rearmament until such time as the Opposition—in the unlikely case that it had anything to spare from its domestic commitments—was put into power, which, considering that the country had recently confirmed the Government in office by a second overwhelming majority, appeared to be as good as postponing it to the Greek Calends. Meanwhile, one could only try to hasten the event by scarifying as capitalist conspiracy every failure to take a firm line, without force to back it, and challenge every Dictator everywhere, except in Russia, to mortal combat.

No doubt it will be said that this is a biased or distorted version of what actually occurred. But it is easier to say this than to point out one single respect in which it fails to be a literal record of facts so notorious that it would be superfluous to specify them in detail. And lest it should be thought that they are set down with any purpose of scoring a party debating point, let me add that the success of this Labour propaganda would have been no more fatal to the country than that of the Conservative group who agitated for Britain to commit the open *felo de se* of intervening against Russia in her war with Finland.

There is no question of treason. The Labour chiefs were no Quislings. The Prime Minister, I think, would be the first to admit

that those of them who have been included in his Cabinet have fallen behind none of their colleagues in devotion to duty, and that such men as Mr. Morrison and Mr. Bevin have proved veritable pillars of our cause. But that such men should have been drawn into what, if they had only realized it, was an almost successful attempt to engineer the downfall not only of the state, but of free civilization everywhere, suggests far more disquieting reflections than any that party organs strive to instil. There must surely be something diseased about a habit of mind so generally diffused that it can impel otherwise able and public spirited men to abandon themselves without resistance to these suicidal delusions, to accept words for things and myths for realities, and to stake literally everything on the assumption of their being true.

#### 4. THE WAR WITHIN THE WAR

There would be no object in dwelling on these errors of pre-war years, if they were things of the past that, however nearly they may have brought us to ruin, have ceased to be relevant to the present or future situation. We could afford to allow the past to bury its own dead. But this particular myth to which I have referred, which sees the whole history of our time in terms of a war of mutual extermination between a dictatorial Right and a socialist, or communist, or democratic (these words being used as if they all signified the same thing) Left, is very much alive to-day, like a volcano in the interval between two eruptions, from which you hear constant muffled rumblings, and which every now and then throws out a sputter of lava.

Now quite apart from the rights and wrongs of the matter, it is only necessary to think it out clearly in order to see that if this fiction gets firmly established for fact in the popular consciousness, we are merely striving for a victory whose fruits will turn to ashes as soon as we try to pluck them. We shall have broken the Axis in vain, if the mere effect of our doing so is to set us free to break ourselves. For if this is to be the state of national consciousness engendered by victory, we might just as well have agreed with Hitler, while we were in the way with him, to come into his New Order, as humble satellites, upon such terms as he might have



been disposed to concede us. For on his terms we might at least have procured ourselves a somewhat longer suspension of the death sentence than any we are likely to get on our own, assuming our own terms to involve the setting up of what, in the ancient Greek cities, was known as a *stasis*—literally a “standing”—of two factions, in a state of chronic enmity; hating each other worse than the foreigner, and sticking at nothing in their mutually destructive proceedings.

Some one will say—look at Russia: there Left solved the problem by exterminating Right, and there was an end of it. Why not in Britain? Because in Britain—fortunately or not according to the point of view—no such solution is conceivable within any practicable space of time. The forces are too evenly balanced. That was proved to demonstration in the General Strike of 1926, when an extraordinarily complete and long prepared mobilization of the manual workers in the towns, with the purpose of winning for the great Trades Unions the effectual sovereignty of the country, was countered and defeated by the practically spontaneous uprising of the upper and middle classes, who in brains and vigour proved at least equal, and even in numbers not so greatly inferior. Whatever allowances one makes for the special circumstances of that particular trial of strength, it surely put it beyond any reasonable doubt that before a clean cut victory, on anything like the Russian model, of Left over Right, could be obtained, there would be no Left, to speak of, surviving to exploit it, or Right to be exploited, but universal chaos, starvation and—what would certainly follow—slavery to the foreigner.

No doubt precisely the same would be the result of a determined attempt to achieve a corresponding victory of Right over Left, even though this amounted to nothing more than a freezing of the *status quo*, and the postponement, *sine die*, of the projects that have been so freely mooted, during the war, for a drastic revision of the social system, so as to eliminate for the future certain inter-war blemishes that have been judged by public opinion to be intolerable.

If on any pretext whatever, we are going back to a regime of mass unemployment, of distressed areas, and contrast between undernourished bottom dog and overnourished top dog, it will

be no use imploring the former to see reason, when he will only be capable of seeing red. And the result will be effectually the same as that of an attempt by Left to eliminate Right.

There is, in fact, no humanly conceivable escape from the conclusion that a state of things after the war, in which the nation is divided against itself into two irreconcilably opposed sub-nations of Right and Left—not even British nations, but each of them mere insular sections of world-wide groupings—is one that can only result in a catastrophe not of the more or less comfortable sort envisaged by the *cliché* about “ the reduction of England to a third class Power ”, but one more likely to entail such a complete social debacle as to make the present plight of Poland or Greece enviable by comparison with hers. And if this be granted, can we resist the conclusion that the deadliest enemies, bar none, that this country has to fear, are those whose eye for the main chance, or sheer fecklessness of irresponsibility, impels them to assist in propagating the suggestion that her natural state is one of Left-Right civil war, which, though partially in abeyance during the affair with the Axis, is not only bound, but ought, to be resumed with Total rigour from the first day of the peace. For plainly, to believe that this is so, is to make it so. And yet no one not wilfully blind can fail to see with what pertinacity and success this work is being carried forward, and how effectively the deadly seed is being implanted.

If there is any excuse for alarm at the present time, it is here. You will have to go far to meet the man or woman in this country whose flesh creeps at the prospect of a German victory, even when they tune in their wirelasses to the Bremen wavelength, and hear that Prince of entertainers, Mr. William Joyce, snarl his certainty of this event in his most blood-curdling fe-fo-fum vein. How long it will take to finish the job is another matter, but that it will be finished there is no doubt on this side of the North Sea—and not much, one fancies, on the other. But upon people who can see further than the end of their noses, there is dawning a dreadful apprehension that the end of the war may be only the beginning of a worse ordeal. And I cannot help suspecting that there is quite a sprinkling of those who—unadvisedly, no doubt, but humanly—regard the end of the war as some pious Christians do

death, in the light of a happy release that they would gladly see deferred to as remote a future as possible. For though they feel that at least we shall all be comparatively united till, and victorious at, the end of this war; in the war after the war, if it comes, they know that we shall be a house divided against itself, and, as such, doomed to fall.

## 5. SUICIDE POSTDATED

That war is not only being prepared for, night and day, but to a certain extent is actually on. Nor do the more ardent combatants attempt to disguise their belligerency—rather do they glory in it. Only recently it was blurted out in Parliament itself that the real war was not being fought against Germany at all, but between Right and Left—in fact a class war. Which, of course, exactly defines the standpoint of the Quislings; for that fact that the redoubtable Norwegian Major, like the even more redoubtable French Marshal, is ready to sell his country in a black sack, or a brown, instead of a red one, does not affect the principle of the matter in the least degree. And some of those who cry treason loudest against Sir Oswald Mosley, would have no grievance against him at all if they did not believe the sort of treason they allege against him to be irreconcilably opposed to their own sort.

Such open extremists may constitute a blessing in disguise, because, whatever may be the case after the war, their undisguised attempts to split the forces of freedom in face of the enemy are likely to recoil on the heads of their authors. What is far more dangerous is the unremitting campaign of suggestion and inuendo that is being waged, without any avowal, and more often than not without any conscious propagandist intent, to work up the popular mind into a state of inflamed class consciousness. The smallest straws in the wind may be the best pointers. The pother, for instance, about that harmless adornment, the old school tie, which, even when it exists, is seldom worn, and if worn, signifies no more, to the uninitiated, than any other tie. But the inference supposed to be drawn is that the wearer is a capitalist snob, glorying in his capitalism, and flaunting an education and breed-

ing he has no right to possess, in the face of honest proletarians, whose sons—it is somewhat startlingly deduced—ought equally, after the war, to become qualified, at the public expense, to wear old Etonian and the like ties for ever happy afterwards.

I am not trying to minimize for a moment the heavy case that can be made out, on more grounds than one, against the spirit, and still more, the mentality, that the ordinary public school education tends to engender. But to deal with these things in a spirit of fleeing malignancy, is the very way to engender a counter-team spirit that will frustrate all reforms that enlightened people, not excepting headmasters, are straining every nerve to promote. To reconstruct the educational system as a phase of the class war will be to reduce it to chaos, and to destroy those solid foundations on which, when whatever there may be of snobbish or reactionary superstructure has been cleared away, we have to build. And notoriously this is not the only, or the least of the evils that talk of this kind is calculated—and meant—to bring about. For the public school tie myth is only one of those little splitting wedges that countless Lilliputian hammers are employed in driving into the friable structure of national unity.

I am not asking you to take it from me, but to test the truth of it for yourself. I can suggest no more fruitful field for investigation than is afforded by the stunt press of the baser sort—I mean those daily, and still more, weekly publications, that with no ostensible party bias, concentrate on the sole purpose of maximizing the sales of each number by a technique of which the late Horatio Bottomley was the greatest English master, and Hitler is the past master of all time; the technique of exploiting the mob by working upon its lowest passions. The highly skilled and cynical journalists who work this racket may be regarded as practically free from any sort of ideological bias, and would probably be ready to boost any cause, with equal ardour, from ultramontaniam to devil-worship, that could be relied on to relieve the public of its pennies, or enhance the value of advertising space.

Now I do not think that anybody, whatever his opinions, will be prepared to dispute, on point of fact, that since the war, the deliberate exacerbation of hate, not only against the foreign enemy—which is no more than happens in all wars—but within the

community itself, in the form of a perpetual egging on of Left against Right, has been conspicuously on the increase. This is the more remarkable, since the organs to which I refer are none of them ostensibly catering for working class audiences as such—if one shuts one's eyes and tries to think of a typical reader, he or she takes a low genteel form not very different from that of Mr. T. E. Eliot's "small house-agent's clerk", or the frail typist, who, on his groping his way out of her flat, smooths her hair, puts a record on the gramophone, and thanks God that that is over.

Here, naturally, the maximum publicity is provided on all possible occasions to those self-advertising free lances or disappointed careerists who hang about on the fringe of war-time politics, with no fixed principle except that of stirring up all the trouble and discontent they possibly can. The cue for these gentlemen, who sometimes constitute themselves by twos and threes into parties with wonderful high-falutin' names, is to set up as a sort of Outside Left, usually with the addition of a lip homage to the formulas of war-time patriotism, whose effect is not noticeably apparent in their proceedings. I can hardly believe that anyone who has the remotest contact with journalese circles will be quite simple enough to imagine that the prominence given to the often two page pronouncements of these worthies, and the fees paid to secure them, are prompted by a disinterested desire to provide a free platform for all sorts of opinions. When Mr. Cleon, M.P., takes upon himself to warn his countrymen that the patience of the British worker in some key industry is so nearly exhausted, that unless the most extravagant of his demands on the community at large are conceded out of hand, the rugged martyr will have no choice but to paralyse the national war effort by a strike; or when Mr. Soapey Sausageseller, who has just carried Eatanswill for the new Victory party, explains to his countrymen how they are all being sold and betrayed by everybody in authority except the Prime Minister—whom it is not safe to attack openly—to International Finance, or the Capitalists, or the Tories, or whatever the fancy name may be; an agreeable stimulus is provided for jaded war nerves, and the result is such as to redouble the efforts of the editorial department to keep the trough constantly replenished with even more luscious swill.

Of which there is always plenty more to be had, at a price, from the obliging Mr. Cleon and his peers.

But the staff itself is quite capable of carrying on at a pinch independently of this outside assistance. Day by day, week by week, the work proceeds, by suggestion, distortion, inuendo—to put it no lower—magnifying every grievance, and inflaming every minor irritation into a festering sore. If you doubt it, I can only invite you to run through the next copy that comes your way, and I shall be very greatly surprised if you are not hit in the eye by one or more specimens of the sort of thing indicated. To take one that I remember some time ago, when the stunt feature for that particular Sunday, indicated by scare headlines that, to the best of my recollection, quite dwarfed the war news, was provided by the discovery that a certain Colonel on a local council had complained that his particular district was overstocked with evacuees (Colonels, I need hardly remind you, being, in the Left mythology, always reactionary buffoons). Whether he was right or not in this particular instance I have not the faintest idea, nor, I fancy, had the journalist employed to work up that particular stunt. But that was no bar from sounding the note of alarm and denunciation all over the country, or from producing a terrific leader in which the charitable hope was expressed that the unfortunate officer's own home would be crowded to capacity, and he himself made to suffer all the inconvenience possible. Which is trivial enough in itself, and perhaps the Colonel in question may have had himself to thank for allowing his nerves to get the better of his judgment. Even so it would have been better from every point of view, except a selling one, to have left him in the obscurity he deserved, and had always, hitherto, achieved. Nor would there be any excuse now for recalling the incident, were it not that the unceasing repetition of this sort of thing has the effect of propagating a spirit throughout the country that is calculated to prolong the war, and crown it with a peace even more disastrous than the last.

For it is the spirit alone that counts in the long run. Let the spirit be right and then, as we have reason to know, it will take more than Hitler to beat us. But once let the spirit be wrong, and there can be no question of our thinking clearly or acting greatly.

A spirit by which the country is divided against itself, is as fatal as the stone which Medea gave to Jason, which, when he tossed it into a company of armed warriors, caused them to turn their swords against each other until all were destroyed. Such a stone is being held, fully charged, for release after the war, and meanwhile a bombardment of chips and fragments, from the same quarry, is kept up without ceasing.

Those who speculate whether or not we *shall* lose the peace are using the wrong tense. The peace *is* being lost, here and now, so far as it is in the power of these wreckers in our midst to lose it. And if their efforts are successful, we shall wake up, after victory, to find that it is lost beyond all possibility of recovery. The evil spirit that has been so sedulously fomented will have got completely out of control, and it will make little difference to our fate that we shall have broken the Axis.

But if it is in our power, here and now, to lose the peace, it is equally within our power to win it. The issue is still in the balance, and so delicately may it be poised that no one can be sure but that his or her individual effort may impart the decisive tilt. None of us at least can go wrong by acting as if it were so.

## VI

# GOD HELPS THOSE . . . .

### I. CONSERVATIVE REVOLUTION

**I**N these days of scarcity, it would lead to an incalculable saving of time and paper, if it were only understood that we can build no future whatever, good or bad, except upon an existing foundation. We have not an infinite choice of alternatives, as those people seem to assume, who come to us with all sorts of patent plans for reconstituting the order of society. What we are now, if we cast our memories back to some point not too far away in the past, is seen to be the unfolding of what we had it in us to be; what we shall be, at the same distance ahead in the future, can be no more than what we are potentially now, even though

we may not be so poor as to contain only one possible future. We are none the less masters of our fate, from not being its capricious magicians.

When therefore we say that the British way is, for us, the best, it is because it is the only way; nor need it be taken to imply that it is better in the abstract than any other. Whether, or in what sense, the British Commonwealth may be said to have set up a new model of civilization, is a matter demanding separate consideration. But that our way is the only way for us, follows from the same cause that makes the oak sapling grow into the oak. The judicious landscape gardener might conceivably be able to show how much better the tree would look if it were shaped like the ash, or covered with blossoms like the chestnut, or even if it conformed to some visionary pattern of gold boughs and silver leaves. But since it happens to have started from an acorn, there is no non-oaken alternative, except to wither and die. Had it been the humblest thorn or scrub it would equally have been bound to develop on its own lines, or not at all.

One almost needs to apologize for setting down what nobody would dream of disputing when it is a question of trees. And why we should expect men and peoples to be more capable of cutting themselves loose from their past and conforming to some abstract or ideal pattern, it is difficult to comprehend. And yet in nearly everything that is said or written on the problem of shaping a new order of society, domestic or international, after the war, it seems to be more or less taken for granted that the different nations and peoples are like so many lumps of homogeneous plasticine. That of course is the assumption common to all—or ought we to say both?—those secular Islams of our time that have been christened by the name of "ideology". There is a Marxian pattern, there is a Fascist-Nazi pattern. If you come within either orbit, then no matter what may have been bred in the bone or implanted by centuries of tradition, you have got to wipe it all clean off the slate, and then write in its stead what is dictated to you off the record. That, at any rate, is the theory. How it works out in practice may not be quite so simple. It takes more than a shirt to change the colour of a soul.

Now there has never been anything that by the remotest



stretch of imagination could be described as English or British ideology, and it is safe to say that as long as these words retain anything like their present meaning, there never will be. It is not our way to fix upon a pattern or dogma in advance, and then seek to impose it on others, still less conform to it ourselves. We have grown into what we are, and even if, in the future, we cease to grow blindly, we shall be the gardeners and not the mechanics of our destiny. The modern itch for getting out blue-prints of our condition so many months or years ahead, and then conforming ourselves all exactly to them, is as abhorrent to the British nature as it would be to lie down on the bed of King Procrustes, who may claim to have been the first practitioner on record of the method of fitting the man to the plan, instead of the other way about.

Now if you look back on the long record of British progress, continuous from the first tribal dooms of local Kings to the world-wide order that we call the Commonwealth of Nations, you will find one very remarkable and unique circumstance about it. No matter how boldly and thoroughly an Englishman may achieve progress, he always likes to think of himself as doing it like a crab, backwards. All his reformations—except those which he hastens to repudiate—take the form of restorations. Practically every great constitutional advance in our history has been by way of restoring *the status quo*. Even Tennyson, who as a rule was more successful than any poet before or since in giving expression to what the average Englishman is incapable of expressing for himself, signally failed to do so when he talked about ringing out the old and ringing in the new. Progress in England has always taken the form of ringing out the new and ringing in the old—the very word reform has a sort of subconscious stress on the first syllable. And nobody knew this better than Tennyson himself when he defined British freedom as broadening down from precedent to precedent. Only what he did not say was that the Englishman's precedents have not unfrequently turned out to be more revolutionary than other peoples' innovations. I wonder how many there are to whom the mention of Somerset's case will suggest anything more than a faint mustiness of tomes in a solicitor's office. And yet there is surely no more epoch-making

event in the history not only of British, but of human liberty, than the discovery at the height of the eighteenth century, that no slave could set his foot on English soil without becoming automatically a free man. Now that very great judge, Lord Mansfield—a Scotsman, by the way—who laid down this principle, was no friend of liberty in the abstract, and indeed exhausted every legal artifice to avoid having to give a decision so injurious to vested interests. But once he was forced to adjudicate on it, the law, as he himself said, had to decide, and it turned out (though no one before had officially discovered it) that the state of slavery was so repugnant to its spirit that “whatever inconveniences may follow from the decision, I cannot say this case is allowed or approved by the law of England; and therefore the black must be discharged.”

That, I think, is an example whose significance it would be hardly possible to over-estimate, of the British way of progress, which, instead of trying to fit itself into some ideological pattern, looks into the depth of its own soul, and then devotes all its energies to making good in practice that which it has already proved good in principle. That is the real, and profound meaning, of that great, fundamental maxim, in which is contained the whole spirit of the Constitution, and all that is worthy the name of patriotism—*To thine own self be true.*

For consider once again all that is implied in, and follows from, that historic pronouncement of Mansfield's; and remember that, at the time it was spoken, the traffic in slaves, with all the unspeakable horrors it involved, was one of the most flourishing items in the account of that commercial prosperity which, to the tough-gutted conscience of the eighteenth century, was much more of a national religion than what passed for Christianity. The grand old judge, whose features in the beautiful print of Bartolozzi that looks down upon me as I write, bespeak him as hard a man as any of that hard age, looked into the spirit of the British law and found, to his positive dismay, that the spirit of slavery was not there, that it was not British. And within little more than the space of a generation, British statesmen at the Congress of Vienna, men as realistic and unemotional as he, but driven on by an irresistible urge of the public conscience, were

ready to forego the most substantial material gains—and we might have had the Dutch East Indies for the asking—in order to get this damnable trade outlawed from the society of civilized nations.

What I want particularly to emphasize is that this, though based upon ancient principle, was an application so unexpected as to have all the effect of a revolutionary innovation. I do not think it conceivable that the most liberal minded judge—if there was one answering to that description—of Stuart or Tudor times, would, if the question had been raised, have seen what was so clear to a Lord Chief Justice of the time of George III.

And there were other discoveries being made at the same time. For this year, 1772, was the year before the Boston Tea Party led to the discovery, not in America only, but by the most representative of Englishmen, that a British empire over British born people was as un-British as the slave trade. The founders of the American Constitution were, in full consciousness of what they were doing, vindicating the spirit of the British Constitution; they took their stand just as consciously upon the ancient liberties, and the principles of Magna Charta, as the men who abolished Star Chamber and those who called in Dutch William to rule them. They were no revolutionaries, but restorers, and their restoration has endured, and gone on progressing ever since, while revolutions have, most often, had their sequel in counter-revolutions that have brought *their* sort of progress to a halt, or even put it into reverse.

Are we not putting it in the most modest terms possible when we reaffirm our faith that for us, at least, there is no way of progressing like that which we and our fathers have trodden for all these centuries of our existence? We should be mad to change it now for that of any imported ideology, however plausible. We are neither Black nor Red nor Left nor Right, nor ever shall be so long as we rest true to our proper and common self.

## 2. FREEDOM FOR SLAVERY

What has been most distinctive in the past of the British spirit, is that by simply remaining true to itself it has also con-

trived to be creatively and expansively progressive. It has found in itself, at least up to very recent time, the answer to each fresh problem with which it has been confronted.

Now in the modern age conditions have been so revolutionized as to confront us with a radically different set of problems from any in the past. The sort of history on which we used to be brought up used to record the development of British liberty in a long series of constitutional reforms, from Magna Charta down to the latest of the series of Reform Bills. But the edifice of constitutional liberty is, in its main proportions, practically complete. That does not mean that it can be preserved without perpetual vigilance. We know only too well how easily and insidiously our liberties can be encroached upon. But in principle they are conceded, now that practically everyone has a vote, and is equal to his neighbour before the law, except for such few odd relics of privilege as may be tolerated by popular favour or indifference.

This gradual building up of free institutions, and still more, of the capacity to work them, constitutes in itself an immense, and perhaps a unique achievement. For it is the mark of this British plant of freedom that it is instinct with its own vitality, and cannot be prevented from striking roots, and springing up in equal strength, on any soil peopled by those brought up in its tradition. Whereas it has been shown only too plainly that where the tradition of it is lacking, the most elaborately devised and safeguarded democratic constitutions may turn out to be not growing things at all, but artificial constructions incapable of bearing the least strain, and liable to collapse by their own rottenness and instability.

Therefore it would be not only unpatriotic, but futile, for anyone with British blood in his veins to use language that could be taken as implying disparagement of this evolving impulse of liberty, which has given birth, on a national scale, to so rich a progeny of free, democratic institutions, and on a world-wide scale has shown how nations can unite and co-operate on a footing of spontaneous goodwill. But it is no disparagement to suggest that even the greatest achievement is not final—rather the reverse; for a people that had no more left to do than to rest

on its laurels would have no excuse for surviving. To cease to create is to cease to live.

The great victories of progress may be likened to a series of bridges over otherwise impassable chasms. This great double bridge of British liberty may rank as an achievement second to none on human record. But the use of a bridge, according to the old and wise saying, is to pass over, and not to build upon. We have now to pass over to a more difficult country and a more heroic adventure than any we have hitherto experienced. But it is only by that bridge that we could have arrived there, and it is only by guarding it intact that we can ever hope to maintain ourselves on our new advance.

To say that the time has come for us to enlarge and deepen our conception of liberty is nothing new. We have been doing that throughout the whole course of our national existence. But up to the present age we have been able to do it in our own time; it has not mattered so much even when we have allowed the clock to be put back, for the impelling spirit has always been strong enough, sooner or later, to make up for its own arrears. But now the pace of life has been so immeasurably speeded up, that we can no longer afford to set that of our own reaction to it. Unless we are capable of shortening into as many years what would formerly have been the progress of decades, progress itself will come to a dead end. The cord of vital continuity will have been snapped, and all that has been bequeathed by previous generations will go for nothing.

We have seen, in nation after nation on the Continent, how it is possible for democratic constitutions, bristling with safeguards, to be swept into oblivion by some upstart tyrant's broom, without a hand being lifted to save them. The liberalism that was the last word of progress in the nineteenth century is as out of date in the twentieth as the crinoline—even in England official liberalism has ceased to count for more than the unlaidd ghost of its former self.

But in England, at least, there is no reason to associate this attitude with any falling off of devotion to freedom. If the party called Liberal has fallen under a cloud, this is fully to be accounted for by its patent failure to retain anything distinctively liberal

except the name. But quite apart from this, there is a palpable lack of enthusiasm for the largely negative ideal of freedom that was the inspiration of the great nineteenth century Liberals, men like Gladstone and Mill and John Bright. Their sort of liberalism, weighed in the balances of the present day, is found wanting not because it was liberal, but because it only went half way towards setting men free, which is the proper goal of the Liberal idea.

I do not think that this could be said about those countries on the Continent that have sold themselves out to tyranny, because they had no tradition of freedom in their souls. The typical Prussian, there would seem every reason to believe, rejoices greatly when he finds an efficient leader to take the burden of responsibility off his back, and fit him into his appointed place in an efficient state machine. For freedom is a burden as well as a privilege, and tends to become more and more crushing with every heightening of the tempo and deepening of the complexities of life.

That is the master difficulty in the way of those who strive for human freedom, and one that none of those magnificent optimists who were its champions during the nineteenth century ever seems to have appreciated. To them it was only a question of throwing open the doors of the prison, of striking his fetters off the slave and putting the key of his own liberty into his hand, which was quite easily and simply done by means of a sufficient number of ballot boxes, a Parliament House, and a constitution by which all the freedom of which human ingenuity could conceive should be guaranteed for all time by entrusting it to the guardianship of its beneficiaries. For as Gladstone so nobly declaimed, the surest defence against tyranny is in the breasts of free men. Nobly perhaps, but if Gladstone could return to earth, he might find it rather too large a mouthful even for him to swallow, in the light of modern experience. And yet one hardly dares to say, when exactly the same sort of rhetoric is being broadcast all over the world in the name of the United Nations, about those four unexceptionable freedoms which rather remind one of the sort of Christmas presents forced upon disgruntled children, from which they seek to derive no other pleasure than that of smashing them to bits with all speed and gusto.

The experience of the world made safe for democracy by the victory of 1918 and the settlement of the following year suggests that some at least of the oppressed peoples of Europe, once their chains are struck off, and they are left free to choose, are likely to opt for four rather different freedoms from those listed at Washington:

(1) The freedom of the slavemaster to wallop his own niggers, in the shape of as many weaker peoples as his frontiers can be stretched to include (often euphemized as "ending Partition").

(2) The freedom of the criminal to make his will, or "sacred egotism", his law (right of sovereignty).

(3) The freedom of the bully to arm himself to the teeth, for the purpose of riding this same will roughshod over the freedom of his neighbours (national honour).

(4) The freedom—by no means inconsistent with the other three—of a freedom-hating populace to shift the burden of its freedom on to the shoulders of a tyrant, thus constituting itself by proxy a master race of slaves.

Moreover the omission of these freedoms from the guaranteed list has been largely compensated for by the clause in the Atlantic Charter that unconditionally concedes to every nation the right to choose the form of its own government.

It comes to this: no one was ever set free or kept free except by himself. The most that can be done for those who are incapable of breaking their own chains is to set them free to achieve freedom.

But of what avail is that, when the will to freedom is lacking? You might as well think to confer freedom on a dog by turning him adrift. The dog's only object is to get a master, and if you take away the one he has got, he will either pine to death or wander round looking for another.

But the will to freedom is not something like the sex instinct, that you take for granted in any normal man. On the contrary, the more you come, in the light of our vastly increased modern knowledge, to explore the whole history of human association, the more it will be borne in upon you that an effective will to freedom is the rarest of exceptions, and that even when it does

appear, it is one of the frailest and most transient of phenomena. Human nature, unless it is capable of generating an enormous power in itself, resembles dead matter in seeking the line of least resistance. And the line of least resistance is that of the passive obedience that resigns its will wholly into somebody else's keeping. But the power within, that is capable of maintaining the will of every man to be first the arbiter of his own destiny, and then freely to combine with his peers in shaping a common destiny, is not to be generated on a sudden impulse, or within the span of one lifetime. It needs to be built up, as it has been in England, by the creative endeavour, continually renewed, of a whole national lifetime.

It is the question of all questions now whether the whole of our own past, upgathered in the present, will give us strength to sustain a trial beyond all human precedent. For without that foundation we should beyond doubt be swept away as hopelessly as the great civilizations of the Continent, in the flood that mankind has unloosed upon itself. And even so the odds against us, if we dared to compute them, might seem overwhelming. But it is fatal to calculate the chances of victory, when to lose is unthinkable. The mood called for is imperative. And if we must needs bring the indicative to its support, let it not be to indicate chances, but means.

### 3. NOT THE SIZE BUT THE SPIRIT

Before we come to deal more explicitly with the way in which our present conception of liberty needs to be enlarged, let us very briefly consider what, through all these centuries, this supreme heritage of our Anglo-Saxon civilization has grown up to be.

For here we cannot avoid using that most ungainly and probably inaccurate compound. One has got to take the King's English as one finds it, and there is simply no other word, that anyone would understand, to comprehend the vast scope of the thing we are dealing with. By Anglo-Saxon, then, I mean the whole spiritual membership and unity of those who have been brought up in a common tradition, and who, in spite of all individual, or even national differences, have a common past, that includes



Magna Charta and Habeas Corpus, King Alfred and Shakespeare, amongst other items, and who, in times of stress, discover that there are certain things that they are all, in the words of one of them, Abraham Lincoln, agreed "shall not perish from the earth", and who at such times are forced—however unwillingly—to recognize that the things that divide them are nothing in comparison to those that bind them, and force them to stand, together.

Now though it would be futile to try to give rigid definition to this idea of Anglo-Saxon civilization, it is obvious that its scope is both wider and narrower than that of the British Commonwealth of Nations. No one could pretend that the members, for instance, of the great Hindu civilization are partakers of the British tradition, in the sense that this can be said of the citizens of the United States. The question of sovereignty hardly enters into the matter, and even that of race is largely irrelevant: the test is one of an inner compulsion to feel and act alike about the things that most matter.

Even thus limited, it will be seen that we are dealing with something of a vastly greater scope than is comprehended by the word "insular" or even "national"—nothing less than one of the world's key civilizations, second in importance to none, not even those of ancient Greece or Rome, let alone those of Russia or Western Europe to-day. To talk of Britain as a mere unit in the family of European nations is childish. She is the mother of a greater progeny, the founder and associate of a world order in which it is not inconceivable that the nations of Western Europe may eventually opt for membership.

That is the first thing to grasp, if we are to understand what this idea of a common, and British-born, civilization really implies—what we are fighting to preserve. It is something on a vast scale; far vaster than we have been accustomed to envisage. And it includes two quite distinct ideas: first, that of the Anglo-Saxon nucleus, those white peoples to whom the heritage has come, not by race or blood or any physical community, but by spiritual descent; secondly, the model league or leagues of nations that are united by the principle of free association that is the special gift of Anglo-Saxon civilization to the world. For there

is in making an American as well as a British Commonwealth of Nations, and these two, in the Dominion of Canada, and more recently, in the West Indian Islands, have begun to overlap and interpenetrate one another.

But we should be turning our backs both on the past and the future, if we were to think of this merely in terms of size. That would be to descend to the vulgarity of the *England über Alles* song, to which Elgar has put such incongruously noble music, about setting her bounds wider and wider, and demanding of some Jehovah Podsnap to hurry up with the good work of making her mightier yet. It would be to degrade her to the status of a common Empire, classed among the other members of that dropsical species, and doomed to share the fate that has never failed to overtake them.

It is not the size that determines the worth of a civilization, but the spirit. To sprawl over fifty per cent or more of the land surface of the globe would be nothing in itself to make a song about, except for morons on the theme of "Fatter still and fatter". But to have breathed a new spirit into the world, to have created a new model of civilized polity, would be a theme for patriotic pride at which no one could cavil. That, in fact, has been the real claim of every great civilization to honourable remembrance. Rome lives not in her empire, but her law; the glory that was Greece is only to an infinitesimal degree that of the semi-barbarian Alexander. And it was a Greek who proclaimed what, once formulated, should be self-evident, that men keep together in communities in order to live well. Greatness, where it can be claimed for any civilization, is to be measured by the extent to which it has, by its own example, taught mankind to live better. It is on such grounds, and such alone—not on any "wider and wider" slush, that the case for our own civilization and its claims on our devotion have got to repose. Otherwise, there is nothing to differentiate our contention with the Axis from a glorified episode in gang warfare.

#### 4. SELF HELP IN COMMON

The spirit of our civilization has its counterpart in nothing that exists, or has existed, on the face of the earth. And yet it is not easy to define in what its distinctive quality consists. Merely to call it democratic gets us nowhere—many countries outside the pale have been more consciously and intransigently possessed with the urge to level out all human differences, than so essentially conservative a country as England, or so racially exclusive a dominion as that of South Africa, or even such a rich man's paradise as the United States. And yet there is a toughness about the habit of popular self-help, among peoples that inherit the Anglo-Saxon tradition, such as we look for in vain elsewhere. Nowhere has there been the faintest real tendency to succumb to the allurements of the dictatorial idea, either from the Left or the Right. The only attempt that has been even moderately hopeful, to make anything resembling Fascism a going concern in the British Commonwealth, has significantly enough been among the backveld Boers in South Africa.

Democracy is another of those words which, in spite of its ancient and honourable lineage, is converted, in modern discussion, to the uses of a smoke screen. It is even applied, without a blush or a wink, to the autocracy of Stalin, on the principle, one can only suppose, that all rats in the same ship are democrats, until they leave it—provided it is our ship.

What is the English rendering of democracy—if that is the right word for it—can be best understood by tracking the unbroken thread of its development from its earliest beginnings till now. It is not the desire to equalize out all human distinctions: the idea that Jack is as good as his master, and a sight better. It is much more the idea that Jack is his own master, and that where you have a number of Jacks associated for any common purpose, they will somehow or other contrive to get the show run in their own way, even if they see fit to employ a boss, or a team captain, or a head of the state, to run it. It is, if I may be allowed to repeat it, a habit of popular self-help, a capacity for getting things done

from the man-bottom up, in contrast to the will of a sovereign, transmitted mechanically as from the control room of some vast, centralized mechanism.

But to pry too candidly into the origins of this faculty may, I am afraid, be judged inopportune, at a time when it has become almost part of the national war effort to brand with the stigma of Satanism everything that has ever been associated with the adjective "Teutonic". For it was their incurable tendency to obey no orders but their own, and to impose their will on their leaders, that most impressed the Romans about those blond barbarians who proved more than a match for their vast centralized autocracy. The name German, in the hey-day of the Cæsars, signified the exact opposite of the perfectly adjustable human machine part it does to-day—in the shape of a wild, untamable individualist whose way of ordering his affairs is indicated in one of those tremendous sentences of Tacitus that defy translation, but to which this comes nearest:

"About small things, their chiefs consult; about great things, all of them."

In my own undergraduate days, before the word German had acquired its present sinister associations, one was taught to accept as a matter of course the idea that our habit of settling our own affairs in common was brought over from the Continent by those admirable Saxon pirates who, quite in the modern Teutonic style, were assumed, on no particular evidence, to have accomplished the improbable feat of clearing all the best part of England of its original inhabitants. No doubt there was a great deal of nonsense written on this theme—though nothing compared with what has been put about in the effort to purge our past of every Teutonic, or even Nordic association—to the effect that the only Anglo-Saxons who came over consisted of a few boatloads of savages who staked out claims for themselves in the neighbourhood of the rivers up which they penetrated, that the Roman tradition was carried on in England without a break, that even the Norman conquest was a French or Latin conquest, and that the idea of some embryo form of self-government by the folk, in their moots, was a romantic illusion that any expert could debunk to the satisfaction of other experts. Which was no doubt true to the

extent that the proceedings on such occasions were pretty certainly of a more rough and informal nature than one would gather from books on constitutional history. But every scrap of the very scanty evidence that has come down goes to show that no king or chieftain could take a step of the least importance without getting the support, if not of all the people, at least of all of them that mattered; and that not only the conduct of war, but even of the prosaic routine of raising food from the soil, was governed by the as yet unformulated principle: "What touches all must be approved by all."

Nor, I think, is there much doubt that this habit of mooting things before doing them, which is the acorn of our constitutional oak, was brought over, or at least immensely strengthened, by what we were taught at school to call the Anglo-Saxons; and that it was reinforced by successive infusions of Norsemen and Normans who were possessed by it to an extreme degree.

It would hardly be worthy of a great people to deny, for the sake of propaganda, that this habit is one that at the time was common to all that loosely defined family for whom the word Nordic is at least a better designation than Teutonic, and that for many centuries it continued to be quite as strong in what was then Germany, as in England. If the Germans have bartered away that heritage, and left us to maintain it, as the trustees for mankind, in arms against them, that is surely cause for pride, though a pride that may be humbled by considering how much more kindly fate has dealt the cards to us. And incidentally it is as well to remember that something more than half of what we now call Germans are neither Nordic, nor, in the old sense, Teutonic at all.

This is not the place, nor the time, for potting the horribly dry fare that is provided in constitutional history text books, which I am afraid seldom fail to be vitiated by the academic habit of mistaking form for substance, and while sedulously refining upon unessentials, missing the whole real point. The real point of what a journalist would call the constitutional story, consists in the development of this faculty—call it Nordic or Gothic or anything you like—of common self-help, the organizing instinct that impels people of British stock, even when they are

thrown together like the mutineers of the *Bounty* on some remote island, to organize themselves in some practicable form of community. You can see it everywhere to-day; and the humbler and more trivial the mode of its manifestation, the more convincing its witness to the principle. Such a town as the one in which I live, is a veritable imbroglio of clubs, associations, committees—little republics that have sprung up spontaneously for every conceivable purpose, staffed by men and women who desire nothing better than to squander what little leisure they have, free, gratis, and for nothing, in such employment.

We see precisely the same instinct at work in the famous episode of the King of Northumbria, sitting in committee with his thanes round a crackling log fire in his mead hall, and deciding what to do about this new religion of the Cross that the missionaries have brought from overseas; we see it in the first primitive guilds of traders in the towns, met together to arrange their common business, and lubricate it by what is expressively styled as butt-filling.

Now the master problem of English development has been, and is, not only how to keep this faculty operating with undiminished vitality, but to find ways and means for it to operate effectively over an ever widening field and in circumstances of continually increasing difficulty. It was a comparatively simple thing for a horde of warriors to get together somewhere in the forest and signify, by shouts or shield beating, their wish to embark on some promising adventure; perhaps even an expedition to the rich island of Britain under the conduct of that redoubtable and persuasive sea-king, Hengist. But when your community is spread out from the Tweed to the Lizard, and there is no longer the least prospect of getting it all together in one place, how then are you going to provide it with the means of running its common concerns in the way it wants to? And again, when it has expanded into a society of nations spread out over the whole globe?

To these questions the English, the British, and the Greater British peoples have continued to provide answers for the last fifteen centuries or so. They may not always have been complete or ideal answers, but they have been good enough to carry on

with. And this is just what has distinguished Britain from the peoples on the Continent who started in the same way, but one after another have had to give it up, and allow their affairs to slip out of their grasp. It is not for us to assume any natural superiority on that account. Placed as they were, should we not have made the same surrender? There appears to be at least no warrant for assuming the contrary. Fortune, or providence (for if we are to call it fortune it would seem to have functioned with the meticulous foresight usually credited to providence), so contrived things for us as to give us conditions that would hardly conceivably have been more favourable, since they combined the maximum of freedom with the minimum of isolation. And on the other hand, if we were the spoilt darlings of fortune, the Germans might be reckoned her step-children; unless we are to assume it to have been her intention to discipline and dehumanize them into a slave race of world conquerors. But that forest freedom, the noble intractability that led the old Whig, Tacitus, to contrast them so much to their own advantage with his Cæsar-worshipping countrymen—how could that live and thrive in such a cut-throat struggle for survival as the German, with his open frontiers, and with enemies pressing upon him from all sides, was compelled to wage? For in such conditions, this ancestral intractability, while it lasted—as last it did up to the threshold of the modern age—proved a mortal handicap, making it impossible for the innumerable tribes, states, and cities of Germany to unite under any leadership whatever, until the cup of anarchy had been drained to the dregs, and the German people, reduced to the last extreme of misery and humiliation, underwent a sort of conversion, and allowed themselves to be taken in hand by the extremely efficient tyrants of an alien folk, the Borussians or Prussians, and to be drilled, like them, into a state of perfect, homogeneous conformability.

It would be a more helpful, and certainly a much more Christian attitude, if those of our countrymen who undertake to enlighten the rest of us on the subject of Germany, would give a rest to this hysterical humbug about all Germans having, from the earliest times, been sadistic slaves of the Nazi youth pattern; but rather, as he surveys the piteous and understandable tragedy

of the decline and fall of a great people, say to himself, even while he steels his heart to unrelenting war:

“ There, but for the grace of God, go I.”

## 5. SOLID LIBERTY

But it is the knowledge of ourselves, and not of our enemy, that is our immediate concern. For this faculty of minding our own business in common, that runs like a main theme through the unfolding drama of our history, cannot be explained as the result of chance, but must have its roots deep in the soul. And though in its present form it would seem to be almost uniquely characteristic of British civilization, we have seen how, in its origins, it was shared by all those warrior peoples who possessed themselves of the Roman heritage in the West, and who, in the end, came to be possessed by it. Had they been the real conquerors, in spirit as well as in arms, there is no reason why European civilization should not have developed on the same lines as British, instead of being divided from it by a gulf deeper than the Channel.

That common spirit which our fathers shared with their fathers before ever there were any English in England, might be comprehended in the one word “ independence ”. These barbarians were heathen not only literally, but also in the Kiplingese sense of not obeying any orders unless they were their own. Every man—or at least every free man among them, cherished the most uncompromising sense of his own personal dignity. He might stand by the leader of his choice to the last drop of his blood, but, in the vernacular of the English countryside, he warn’t agoin’ to be *druw* by no one, not even the King himself. He was the centre of his own universe. And being this—and an unsentimental realist, he was bound to learn the art of doing things in common, by practical team work, if he wanted to get them done at all.

Now if we can transfer ourselves back in imagination to that pre-civilized existence, and look into what was then the future in the light of our own knowledge of it, we should see that the thing of all others to be decided was whether this spirit of barbaric



independence would be able to survive the vastly changed conditions that must result from the conversion, sooner or later inevitable, to a more settled and refined mode of existence.

We know what was the answer on the Continent. The spirit of freedom, the faith that "the man's the gowd for a' that", applied to the ordering of society, died hard; but with the coming of the modern age, in all but a few social backwaters like certain Swiss cantons, it had come to be superseded by the exactly opposite belief, namely that the man was nothing, and the state, embodied in its sovereign, all in all. This had been the way of Imperial Rome, and Rome, even to her conquerors, *was* civilization. The law of Rome, the religion of Rome, the centralized state machinery of Rome, were as strong as in the days of the Cæsars, except that the Empire was now parcelled out among a number of national and petty Cæsars, with every now and then one of them on the point of uniting all the rest under his *imperium*, but always brought up short by the "thus far and no further" of England.

But in Britain this return to Rome, this exaltation of the State above the Man and of control over freedom, did not take place, except so superficially as not to affect the main current of national life. The man—Everyman and not Superman—continued to be the hero of the piece: the State was for him, and not he for the State. And though the distinction sounds academic, it is fundamental, and of a practical significance that it would be impossible to exaggerate. For it accounts for that aspect of our history which is most distressing to people with tidy minds, its jungle-like complexity and its seeming lack of any clear-cut definition of purpose. Up to a very recent time, if any general principle, even that of liberty, were vindicated, it would seem to have been by accident. Liberty in the abstract was a thing about which even the greatest Englishmen seem to have bothered their heads very little; all that counted with them was to maintain this man or that man in whatever liberties, however selfish and obstructive, he had already got, and to which he could hire a lawyer, by arguments too pedantic and involved for any one but a lawyer to understand, to prove his right, by "having the law" on anyone who disputed it.

King John was a most efficient ruler, in his way, but his baronage had the law on him. King Charles I's personal government was among the most enlightened and prosperous the country has ever had, but the rich men whose privileges he had curtailed had the law on him—or so they claimed—and the real issue at stake in the Civil War was who was having the law on whom. When, finally, Cromwell's victorious army openly took the law into its own hands, it required little more than a decade for all the fruits of its victories to be swept away in a floodburst of almost unanimous national indignation.

A very similar story might be told of the American Revolution which, in the opinion of those who made it, was a simple and stern process of having the law on King George. But on this occasion there was no reversal of judgment, since Washington, unlike Cromwell, was an austere law-abiding person whom Carlyle would never have dreamed of pillorying in the role of Hero-as-King. Otherwise—who knows?—there might have been the seat of a dictatorship on the Potomac, and in the end King George Log would have been brought back to vindicate the law against President George Stork. It is one of the fascinating *Ifs* of history.

But underlying all this litigiousness sublimated into statecraft, there is a consistent, though unformulated principle, and it is the same that we find informing the first, barbaric gropings towards self-government. Free men, when they come together, do not cease to be free; they do not give up any more of their individual liberties than they can possibly help. The state itself is regarded as an association or trust for safeguarding the liberties of its members, and the function of the head trustee, or sovereign, cannot be better defined than in the words of the Psalmist, "To keep the simple folk in their right."

Now that, I submit, is the one constant idea that runs through the whole unfolding development of our civilization, from its pre-historic origins to a Commonwealth and brotherhood of free peoples capable of forming the nucleus of a world order. It all starts with the individual, the sovereign unit, the kingdom of one man. And the success of the greater kingdom or commonwealth is measured by the extent to which it enhances the scope and stature, so to speak, of each one of its constituent members. For

in the eye of the law—which is as good as to say the mind's eye of an Englishman—the plain citizen is not regarded as just so much flesh and blood, but as strengthened and increased by every sort of lawful addition, visible and invisible. He has his property and his privileges, his rights and his dues, which give him his weight in the community, and without which he would scarcely be fit to be called a man at all. It is to preserve and maintain these that the English common law and its offspring, the British Constitution, have come into being.

There has never, in the eye of that law or the theory of that constitution, been such a thing as a divine right of kings. But there *is* a fundamental right of the common man, that the King is as powerless to infringe as anyone else, and which includes his right to everything that the law, as an impartial umpire, defines as his own. And it is the sum total of these things that in the traditional English view, constitutes a man's liberties. It is therefore not a question of whether a man is free or not, but of just how much he is free.

That is what imparts its extraordinary toughness and concreteness to the English notion of liberty. It is not, as it was to the men of the French Revolution, a theme for splendid rhetoric, one of the Rights of Man, solemnly affirmed as basic to the constitution and allowed to evaporate with the breath that proclaimed it. To the Englishman his liberties are facts, things that you can prove in court; and the court will not inquire whether they are desirable or not, but simply whether they are there.

Never, in England, has it been reckoned for valid argument, that a man by asserting his liberties, is acting in the teeth of the public interest—if the liberty be his, he has a right to exercise it, and no one can stop him. It might even be that the concession of some concrete liberty might tend to the abridgement of liberty, as when Magna Charta blocked the King's right, by the issue of a certain writ, to call up cases from the courts of his feudatories, who were likely to give short shrift to any humble but inconvenient suitor. If the King had not the liberty to do this, the fact of its not being desirable was neither here nor there. He must either drop it or, if he knew his business, get the same thing done in a different way that would put him on the right side of the law.

And thus like a pyramid, by stone piled on stone, rose the massive fabric of British liberty. Fundamental to it is the stipulation that nothing, neither reason of state nor will of the sovereign, can be pleaded as an excuse for parting the humblest of the King's subjects from the least of his lawful rights. But this, so far from being a platitude or matter of course, is, from the European point of view, something so unique as to be positively shocking. For the view inherited from Rome, and adopted by every Continental state of the least importance, was that in comparison with the state, the individual counted for nothing. The State was all in all; its rights over-rode all other rights, to its interests those of every one of its members must give way. And the state was embodied in its sovereign—"it is I", as Louis XIV, the most magnificent exponent of this doctrine, is reported to have said, and compared with which its up-to-date rendering, "The Führer is always right", smacks of the parvenu.

Here, then, you have the great and ultimate opposition, not between this country and that, not between island and continent or between land empire and sea power, but between two ways of civilization, the old and the new; an opposition admitting of no conceivable compromise or appeasement. For the old, being what it is, cannot endure the neighbourhood of the new; it must expunge it from the face of the earth, and either extirpate with it all those who are tainted with its infection, or bring them into such utter subjection as to sweat it out of their very souls. Which, as everybody must realize who is not wilfully blind, and as our enemies have made no attempt to deny, is the fate reserved for us in the event of our defeat.

And even after our victory, if we do not get this issue settled, at all costs and for all time, then our victory, like all previous victories, will be only a respite. The whole business will start over again, and after what may be an even shorter interval than before for rest and recuperation, the wounded monster will be at our throats again, and this time with power enough to get us down. And he, at anyrate, can be trusted to see to it that there is no re-opening of the quarrel.

## VII

## LIBERTY IN CONSTRUCTION

## I. THE UNBROKEN CORD

I HAVE likened the growth of our free civilization to that of an oak, but this, like even the best analogies, tends to be misleading if it is pushed beyond a certain degree of literalness. The difficulties that an oak has to overcome are comparatively simple. It has just to go on striking its roots further and further into the soil, spreading its leaves to the sunlight, and adding every year another ring to its girth. There is in all this nothing that, without pointless stretching of language, can be said to call for initiative or improvisation; nothing that we could possibly describe as a creative faculty. No squire was ever so bark-bound a conservative as the oak in his park.

But of our metaphorical British oak, there is a different tale to tell. That is conservative too, in the sense that the more it grows the more it is the same thing: it is only by growing that it keeps the same. But it is neither hide-bound nor bark-bound. It conserves its continuity by a never-failing genius for creative adaptation. As horizons expand and the complications of life increase, its original problem, that of organizing a free community on a basis of individual freedom, calls for an unfailing series of fresh solutions. And it is by its power to meet every new riddle of the Sphinx with the inspired answer, that the vitality of the organism is revealed.

That power has never yet failed for the growth of British civilization. The vital continuity has been maintained throughout all the long evolution from the folk militant of pre-civilized tribes to the Commonwealth of Free Nations. Those liberties in the concrete, which are all that an Englishman values under that name; individual liberties safeguarded by the law, public liberties embodied in the constitution, have endured and gathered cumulative strength in the course of time. There has been no

break, and only as much going back as there is of individual waves of a continuously rising tide. Our progress, whatever may be thought of its ultimate tendency, is at least along an unswerving line of our own choosing.

Now this, which can be said without the least fear of contradiction about the growth of British civilization, would be more than anyone could possibly assert of the sister civilizations on the Continent. It is common knowledge that the English Parliament was neither the first, nor the most powerful, of the representative assemblies that during the Middle Ages sprang up and flourished all over Western Europe, so that it might have seemed that the peoples of Catholic Christendom were—say at the beginning of the sixteenth century—irrevocably committed to the way of constitutional democracy. And yet by the end of the seventeenth, in almost every country of importance except England, this promise had been hopelessly falsified. The representative institutions survived, if at all, like the empty forms of republican government under the despotism of the later Cæsars. And though, during the nineteenth century, constitutions far more intransigently democratic than those of the Middle Ages proliferated over the face of Europe, the same story was repeated in less time and with greater emphasis; the democratic constitutions toppled down one after the other, and Total despotism was everywhere standardized as the pattern of government. But in Britain Parliamentary Government continued to flourish as strongly as ever; and to-day the Prime Minister himself, though the effectual trustee for the Sovereignty of the Realm, so far from being of the stuff of which dictators are made, is as much entitled as Hampden or Pitt, Gladstone or Balfour, to rank among the greatest of House of Commons men.

It is surely an astounding omission that not a single British historian, or propagandist masking as historian, seems to have remarked this way in which the development of our civilization differs in kind from those of its continental neighbours. For of none of these others can it be said, in the sense that it might of an individual, that it has wrought upon the plan that pleased its childish thought; that the thread of vital continuity has never been broken, and that we can look back upon one unfolding

drama of our own creative evolution. But we *can* say it of British civilization from at least as far back as the time of the Heptarchy to that of the Commonwealth of Nations. We can speak of a British heritage in the sense of which we could not of a French, or German, or Italian. Who, at the present time, could say with any confidence what modern France has inherited, and from whom? A little time ago it might have been thought that this dated from the French Revolution, and that the sapling of democracy then planted had grown up into the goodly tree of the Third Republic. But that tree proved to be rotten within and almost without roots. And after its fall we had the men of Vichy toying, apparently, with the idea of redeeming France by restoring her heritage of the *ancien régime*, even down to resurrecting her pre-revolutionary provinces. And there are other Frenchmen who would look in a third direction, and maintain that the true heritage is that bequeathed by Napoleon.

Who would dare to trace a continuous line of German development? Hitler, we might possibly say, entered into the heritage of Prussia; but that there is either racial or spiritual continuity between old Germany and modern Prussia is too preposterous to maintain. It was just because the Prussian was in all essentials the opposite of the German, that he was so well equipped to effect his conversion from an intractable anarchy to a goose-stepping Robot.

The arrogance of British patriotism about the things that matter least, is not to be compared with its modesty about those that are of decisive importance. If the laurels of victory and pride of empire, backed by ever so long a record of heroic personalities and glorious episodes, were all we had to boast of, in what should we differ from our neighbours? Every cock has an equal right to crow up his own dunghill for best.

But if it should appear that alone among all our neighbours we British have held true, from the beginning, to our own way of free civilization, and that this way is one, and may well be the only one, of escape from the catastrophe that threatens to engulf all civilization—that would be no occasion for boasting, but rather to humble and steady us with the consciousness that we dare not fail, in the years of trial before us, to maintain the heritage and birthright we have received.

## 2. THE BREAKDOWN OF THOUGHT

It might be thought that having continued to develop and defend our heritage of freedom for so many centuries, we need be in no serious doubt of our ability to do so for a few years more. But to think thus is utterly to misconceive the way in which the circumstances have been altered by the speeding up of life in the modern age. The trial to which we shall be subjected is bound to be incomparably more exacting than those of the past. We shall have to bring our whole conception of liberty up to date in fewer years than it would have taken decades under the former conditions.

It is strange, when we consider that the English idea of liberty, or freedom, has been in process of continual expansion and revision throughout the whole of our history, that these words should be bandied about, as if their meaning were comprehensively obvious to every Tom, Dick, and Harry with a taste for political discussion. The nineteenth century Liberals imagined they had conquered domestic freedom by the lifting of every possible government restriction, and by throwing open a free field for competition. Such at least was their theory; but being common-sense and usually humane folk, even they were fain to qualify it very considerably in practice.

But theirs was a magnificent achievement as far as it went; and it was the very completeness with which it was rounded off within the limits set, that revealed what measureless tracts still remained to conquer. For the hardest of Victorian individualists had never set himself to tackle the problem of how to be free on nothing a year, or to explain in what sense the freedom to drudge or to starve differs from slavery. The whole conception of freedom was patently in need of enlargement, under conditions such as had been created in the new towns by the application of machine power to industry.

But here we see the beginning of a subtle and strong temptation to lose heart, and conclude that the old liberties were no longer worth preserving, and that the new conditions called for a new order of controlled society that involved a complete break



with the past, and consequently the snapping of the cord that for eighteen centuries had been maintained unbroken. That this is no imaginary danger may be seen from the innumerable arguments and exhortations to seek salvation according to some patent plan that is as often as not imported from abroad, and, in effect, to set up a completely new order of society, or even to include Britain as an undistinguished unit in some international order. Which is generally what you will discover to be the real intention behind the smoke screen of verbiage put up by the respective apostolates of Right and Left propaganda.

But perhaps the word "intention", so far as it may be taken to imply a conscious purpose, is a little misleading. For the strong probability is that the great majority of such self-constituted apostles, from authors and politicians, to arguers in pulps and debaters in students' unions, are as foggy about their real drift as they are woolly about their verbiage. One cannot get very far with the one-hand literature that used, before the days of paper shortage, to be unloaded on to the faithful with the *Nihil obstat* of some Holy Office not unconnected with that of the publisher, without being irresistibly reminded of an old music hall song:

" 'E don't know where 'e are."

But the addition of mental to verbal chaos is far from rendering such propaganda negligible. Rightly regarded, it may even be said to enhance its danger. Not only that, but its very confusion imparts to it a certain queer element of truth. For it is, at least, as one might say, true to form. Its distorted and clouded mirror reflects the spirit of its time as nothing else could, and may cause it to be regarded, at some future date, as a historical phenomenon of the highest significance. For a breakdown of the capacity of thought to grasp the situation, is no more than under existing circumstances might have been foreboded.

For what, after all, constitutes the besetting weakness of modern civilization, but the failure of the inner man to keep pace with the headlong rate of change in the outer world? It is much as if a schoolboy, who had made a creditable progress in plain arithmetic, were suddenly expected to floor a series of problems

in the higher mathematics. If he forced himself to grapple with them, he would merely find his head swimming, and any answer he produced would be a mere jumble of irrelevancies. But he would be more likely to give up the attempt altogether and perhaps save his *amour propre* by saying that there was no answer.

Now remember that British liberty is not just a thing that has gone on growing of its own accord, but, as we have seen, has evolved by an unfailing capacity for hitting upon inspired solutions to a continual series of fresh problems. Always success is measured by the capacity of society to adapt itself to the new conditions, without sacrificing those individual liberties which it was formed to preserve. And in this the British has been the only one among the major civilizations of Europe to hold the course up to now.

But that is no guarantee against its failing at the present crisis. For the revolutionized conditions that we have created for ourselves are such as to call for powers of adaptation superior to any that have been required of us in the past, though not necessarily superior to those which have enabled us to surmount the crisis of the war. But to unite in maintaining a mind and a heart for the peace on anything like a war-time level, would itself imply a grasp of the problem that would be half the battle for its solution. And the signs of such a necessity being realized are, to say the least of it, ambiguous.

### 3. WHAT WE HAVE, CAN WE HOLD?

But there is at least food for hope to be derived from this most glorious episode in our history—for surely that is no extravagant language to use of the eleventh hour rally to maintain our freedom from external tyranny. It is not only sufficient reason for banishing the word "impossible" from our calculations, and for believing that once we are down to a necessary job, of whose necessity we are convinced, we shall somehow or another find means of putting it through: it is something more definite than that. For we have, through mastering our war-time job, demonstrated not only our capacity to take on that of the peace, but we have actually, to no small extent, shown ourselves the way to go about

it. And not only that, but without realizing it, we have cleared the way, to an extent that would have been inconceivable before the war, for its successful accomplishment.

In a sense we are already down to it. For winning the war and winning the peace are really not two tasks, but one and the same, and the crucial decision before us is whether to keep on with the war effort into the peace, or else, as we did last time, to leave off in the middle.

Now nobody who has made the least study of the British character, from the days of Alfred to those of Churchill, will allege infirmity of purpose as one of its weaknesses. Even the most hostile critics are agreed in alleging the exact opposite; the pig-headed obstinacy of John Bull is proverbial, the signal incapacity that he has evinced, time and again, and never so signally as during the present war, for knowing, even when everyone else knows it, when he is beaten. Nothing in human affairs can be more certain, than that if we as a nation fairly realize that this great task, to which we set our hands in 1940, will not in any sense be concluded by the unconditional surrender of our last enemy, but that the stiffest part of it will be still before us, then, however tired and browned off we may feel, our native obstinacy will come to our rescue, and we shall—even though we grumble damnably after our fashion—stick it out to the end.

*If we realize! If we can be brought to realize in time! It is on that condition that all else depends.* It is not the strength of will that is in question, but the power of thought. So long as that is unequal to grasping and comprehending the urgency of the situation, so long, that is to say, as we are incapable of seeing the necessity for effort, so long shall we make our wishes our counsellors, by yielding to the natural and human temptation of doing as we have done in the past, and making our war effort our whole effort.

Most of all, we have got to enlarge our notion of liberty beyond that suggested by the refrain, "pass the ammunition, and we shall all be free". It is true enough that unless we pass, and discharge, as much ammunition as may be called for, we shall certainly all be slaves or corpses in a very short time. But freedom is a positive thing, and much more is needed to achieve

it than can be done by blowing Hitler or any other tyrant to the devil. That is only the first step towards ensuring an order of civilization in which we shall all have equal enjoyment of that freedom which we claim as our birthright. That is our real task, and until we have carried it to completion we shall be merely fooling ourselves with the idea of victory. It is not enough to have climbed to the top of the tree, if we come down again without plucking the fruit.

We must bear in mind that there is no question here of conjuring up some Utopia of freedom out of the void, or of constructing it as we might a machine, according to some inventor's specification or blue print. If that were the task proposed, we might as well down tools at once, and abandon ourselves to our fate; for on these terms it is not to be done. Rome was not built in a day, or completed in a millenium, and if we were a community of Methuselahs we should still find life too short for the purpose of building any order of society of which the foundations were not already laid. We can only take what we have received from our ancestors, and work upon that. Unless the order we seek is already in being, we shall seek it in vain.

We are not turned loose upon the world to make a fortune out of nothing; what we have to do is to maintain the heritage that has descended to us, improving it as we may, and above all, seeing that it suffers no detriment in our possession. Or if we are to regard it as a heritage of liberty, we may define our task as one of keeping that liberty continually abreast of the times. Such was what every great constitutional enactment from Magna Charta onwards set out to do: to re-state ancient liberties in modern terms. And though we have come to expand our notions of liberty far beyond constitutional limits, that purpose still holds firm:

What from your fathers' heritage is lent  
Earn it anew, in order to possess it.

#### 4. DECONTROL NO PANACEA

There is a certain school of public-spirited and useful people to whom this requirement of keeping liberty abreast of the times

seems the simplest thing in the world, and who probably, if they have honoured us with their company up to this point, will vouchsafe in approving murmur, being quite confident what it is all leading up to. Get rid of all controls the moment the guns cease firing; give a free rein to private enterprise and competition, and cut down to a ruthless minimum every sort of regulation or planning that enlarges the scope of the government, and its officials—and then it follows automatically that we shall all be free!

It would certainly seem so, on the face of it. But when you come down to brass tacks, does it really work that way? Take, for instance, this question of controls. Suppose that the result of their removal is that instead of every purchaser being more or less assured of his fair share of certain necessary things at the shop, the man or woman with the small purse finds that these things have suddenly vanished from the counter, and more than suspects that they have gravitated to the orbit of the long purse. And they find it very little fun to be assured that they are perfectly free to buy whatever they like, when it is not there to buy.

Or again, suppose—what is more a matter of certainty than of supposition—that the effect of lifting the controls is to send prices rocketing to fantastic heights. Then we shall all be free: the shopkeeper to charge a fiver for last month's shillingsworth, and the purchaser to meet his demands with all the treasury paper he does not happen to possess. There may be austere libertarians who would sooner be starved without a ration book than fed with one; but that is a price at which few of us ordinary mortals would be prepared to purchase this freedom. Or to regard it as freedom at all. For it is worth while, in any discussion of this kind, to face up to a question that is nearly always begged: does the removal of control, in this or that particular instance, tend to the increase of liberty? Sometimes quite obviously, it does. As for instance . . . but when you come to think of it, it is not quite so easy as it seems to think of a case off hand where there is nothing whatever to be said to the contrary, and no one whose liberties stand to be infringed to the slightest degree.

Take so plain, and I grant overwhelming, a case as that for the opening of museums and picture galleries on Sundays. It is conceivable that one or more of the attendants at these places

may be devout Sabbatarians of a type that at least is not unworthy of respect, to whom the first day in the week is the Lord's day in the fullest sense, a time set apart for spiritual communion and refreshment. Well, such a good man—if we grant him the right to have his own notions of goodness—has got to like or lump this abridgement of his freedom, unless he is prepared to suffer one far more serious, to him, in his capacity of husband and father, in the loss of his job. You and I will agree—and probably he, being a reasonable fellow, will agree with us—that this is quite as it should be. The sum total of freedom is plainly increased by the opening of the museum, and that is the real test.

But now take a case that is less obvious, of the freedom to stage those lewd entertainments of the baser sort for which the name of "strip tease" has been coined. Here we may grant the freedom of the audience to wallow in any muck it is subhuman enough to demand. But it is different with the performers, on whom this freedom may impose a practically irresistible compulsion of the vilest kind. For it is sheer hypocrisy to tell a would-be decent young woman that she is free to preserve her self-respect, at the price of her career and her bread and butter—even if we suppose her psychologically capable of such initiative. I am not presuming to lay down the law whether or not absence of control, in this case, makes for freedom or against it; though I know very well what, if it lay in my power to decide, the verdict would be. All I wish to imply is that neither here, nor in the vast majority of instances, is a plain "yes" or "no" more than an arbitrary jumping of the claim.

## 5. COMPETITIVE MIRAGE

Again, all this talk of the baneful activities of state or other public officials, though no doubt there may be a formidable element of truth in it, is not nearly such a plain-sailing matter as is almost universally assumed. Most people are accustomed to visualize all official personages not from their own experience of them, but as they are presented to their imaginations by the good offices of the journalists and cartoonists to whom they are indebted for their notion of reality. By these, the official is stan-

andardized to a type at once pedantic and inhuman, always tied up mentally in red tape, a slave of unintelligible formulas, incapable of the least initiative, and at the same time possessing all the instincts of a petty tyrant and inquisitor. Such a contrast, it is implied, to the live wire products of free competition, who function in a corresponding capacity for limited liability companies and private concerns!

Now I can only answer for my individual experience, which for anything I know may be exceptional, and on which I can only invite the reader to check up by his own; but certainly as far as it applies to England of recent years, I can honestly say that it does not fit into this picture at all. If there must be a comparison, I do not think that the public official will come off second best, in respect either of efficiency or of manners. Not even in that most maligned class of all, whose duty it is to screw the uttermost farthing out of an always disgruntled and seldom co-operative taxpayer. Indeed it has always been a wonder to me that these gentlemen—such of them at least as it has been my slightly qualified pleasure to have dealings with—always appear to bring to their thankless task such a large measure of patience and courtesy. On the other hand one has known instances of grasping rapacity and overbearing rudeness, tolerated as common form in the service of companies and shops, that would have precipitated a public scandal if perpetrated under public auspices.

I hope I am not taking too great a liberty if I mention that in my own town probably the two most distinguished citizens, in art and letters respectively, happen to be in the government service, and therefore, I suppose, must rank as officials, along with the late Edmund Gosse, Austin Dobson, and—for that matter—Burns and Wordsworth.

But I need not labour the point further, which is not by any means to deny that the besetting temptation of the official mind is, by the very nature of its employment, to slide into the groove of least resistance, which is that determined by routine and the letter of the law. But I do think that this tendency has, in England at anyrate, been notably diminished in the present century; and that by the calculated encouragement of initiative and by dint of enthusiastic team work, it can, if not entirely eliminated

from the civil service, be at least to a great extent neutralized.

And it is taking an entirely out-of-date view to imagine, not only that the typical public official is like his predecessor of Victorian times, when the circumlocution office and Mr. Bumble were in all their glory, but that the faults charged against officialdom are necessarily less rife in what—since the word private seems a little misleading—we may perhaps be allowed to call non-public concerns. The old type of private employer, competing ruthlessly in an individualist struggle for survival, is as obsolete as the mule jenny and the power loom. Everything now is controlled by boards of directors, representing an electorate of shareholders that is even more divorced from any real control than one of citizens or ratepayers. The old, romantic days of joint stock companies, when the man who embarked his savings on the enterprise was hardly less of an adventurer than he who embarked his person, are long dead. Those thin-lipped and thick-whiskered individualist heroes, whose activities were held up for the emulation of Victorian little boys, and who—or rather the minute percentage of them who succeeded in avoiding disaster—contrived by sweating the last drop out of themselves and their employees to build up out of nothing businesses that they personally controlled, these are now as extinct a breed as that of the former adventurers. And even the high financial magnates who succeeded them, of the type of the

splendid millionaire,  
Who's master everywhere,

of Rhodes, of Pierpont Morgan, of Hugo Stinnes, of the Press Barons and trust bosses, though not yet extinct, are plainly past their zenith, and not likely to count for much worth speaking of in the post-war world. In fact the drift towards the depersonalizing of the whole of those manifold activities that are lumped together as economic, has gone on with gathering momentum along with their mechanization. You can see it even in the losing battle fought by the private tradesman against the great multiple chain stores; in the aristocratic landowners who turn themselves into limited liability companies, in a pathetic effort to compete with a nascent breed of farmer managers who, though they may now



run their own concerns, are likely in the future to approximate more and more to the status of company's agents. And in consequence of this, the old contrast between the public official and the alleged product of free competition becomes more and more a thing of the past. Any great impersonal business, no matter whether it is run on behalf of voters or of shareholders, tends sooner or later to slide into a groove of its own routine, particularly as it is the tendency of all large businesses to eliminate direct competition by becoming more or less sovereign powers in their own sphere, supported by a well-conditioned habit of allegiance, not only of their staff, but even more of their clients. And in consequence those austere propagandists who are constantly pitting what they call individualism against what they call socialism, and who exhort us to keep our vigour and our prosperity alive by giving unrestricted scope to private enterprise and free competition, would appear to be barking up a tree that has been derelict for some time. You can call up free competition as you can spirits from the vasty deep—but will it come when you do call for it?

But again, the decisive test is that which every man ought to, but which very few men do apply for themselves, that of fact. Does it work? Do the council trams contrast so glaringly—and if so how? with the Company's buses? Do public officials like—let us say—General Montgomery, run their concerns better or worse than whoever is responsible for . . . but I would prefer you, if you do not mind, to supply chapter and verse for yourself.

Or is it, in effect, a case of six to one and half a dozen to the other?

At least I hope I have made it clear that the path of liberty is by no means so obvious as it is commonly assumed to be. There is no formula or rule of thumb that you can go by. The individualist who sees the panacea for all social maladies in getting rid of government controls, and the socialist who counters him by clamouring to have everything put under control, resemble nothing so much as two men arguing furiously whether a piebald horse is black or white. It is all of a piece with the futile and fog-breeding controversy between Left and Right.

## VIII

## LIBERTY IN SUSPENSE

## I. INTER ARMA SILENT LEGES

LET us finally get rid of the idea that we can conquer liberty by any programme or prescription. That is not the way in which the long, unbroken growth of our British liberties has proceeded, or is ever likely to proceed. It has never been a question of going out to look for some ideal liberty, but rather of holding fast to that which we have inherited, and adapting it to our present circumstances; which is the same thing, in practice, as keeping it up to date.

But some of the best friends of liberty will no doubt object that this is altogether too rosy a view to take of our present situation. For it is not just as if we had been marking time while the world had gone on; for during the war it would seem as if we ourselves had been progressing very decidedly backwards, and as if we should have more than we can do in making up for our own lost ground. It will be pointed out that the liberty of the subject has been trenched upon in ways that even during the last war, would have been inconceivable: women of fifty torn from their families to work in munitions factories; youths burning to serve their country in the field dragged off, by the blind choice of the draw, to what to many of them must be the dull purgatory of servitude in a coal mine, and, as far as their future careers are concerned, so many of their best years wasted. But of course the heaviest count of the indictment will concern the gross violation of an Englishman's most sacred liberties implied in the power of who knows what official jack-in-office, or hidden influence, to get any one of His Majesty's subjects cast into jail, and kept there in defiance of *Habeas Corpus*, without remedy or cause shown.

In a book specifically devoted to our heritage of liberty, this is the line that I feel nine readers out of ten will expect me to run

for all it is worth. And no doubt a grim enough indictment could be made out, on the strength of such facts as I have cited, and others like them, to call for the most searching investigation. But here, as about so many features of the present situation that seem so obvious, we have to be on our guard lest our feelings shall run away with our sense of proportion. For there is another side of the case that we are bound, however much it may go against the grain, to weigh in a judicial spirit. For without appreciating it, we shall be incapable of understanding the very rudiments of the question of liberty.

Liberty and war have always been as irreconcilably opposed as fire and water, or God and Mammon. War is compulsion, applied in its most brutally uncompromising form; and if you are to apply compulsion effectively, it must be without limit, and almost without scruple. For what is an army but the means of enforcing the will of whoever controls it on any selected enemy? It is, as the name implies, and as we see it pictured in the frontispiece of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, an arm—the arm of the Sovereign grasping a sword. But how, if his arm be never so mighty, and his sword never so sharp, can he use it to impose his will on anybody, unless he first has succeeded in making his arm, or army, as perfectly responsive to his will as even victory can make its object?

And now, under modern conditions, the whole nation, except the very young and very old, has come to be, in effect, the army. Mechanized war is an affair of populations; it is fought in the factories no less than in the field. In scope, as in intensity, it is total.

Now at no time in the world's history has there been any way discovered of running military efficiency and personal liberty in double harness. Even the Romans of the old Republic, who, with their extraordinary political genius, tried to solve the problem by the expedient of the citizen army and temporary dictatorship, were unable to keep it up; inevitably in the course of time the army became professional, and its temporary *imperator* a permanent emperor, who swallowed up all the liberties of all the citizens, except his own. Such genius as Hitler has had, has merely consisted in applying this imperial principle more totally

than any Cæsar ever dreamed of. Total emperor is total liberticide. His message from the first has been:

“ Make (and be) the ammunition!  
And you shall all be slaves.”

Now how is it that the English-speaking communities have been able to hold the course of liberty, when those on the European mainland have so conspicuously failed? By any superior virtue? or just luck? Hard as it comes to any patriot to admit it, we must face up to the fact that in the first place, at anyrate, it *has* been luck, luck so extraordinary and unfailing as almost to merit another name. And the luck has consisted in this, that not only Britain, but the white communities through which her civilization has expanded overseas, have been so placed that they have been able to develop their liberties with an almost entire disregard of military considerations. Their real slogan ought to have been:

“Starve the army! skimp the ammunition!  
And we shall all be free.”

England has done this, because ever since the days of the Norman Conquest she has had enough sea power to keep her shores inviolate. And according to Bacon's famous dictum, he who commands the sea can take as much or as little of the war as he likes.

The Continental nations, with their open frontiers, have sooner or later found themselves bound to put military needs first, and damn the consequences to liberty. Their sovereigns have in consequence become emperors; not the talking shop, but the fighting machine, has ruled the roost; it is not the liberties of the subject that are wanted, but his obedience. But even in England, there have been times when her last barrier has been imminently threatened, and she has had to provide for her defence at all costs. And on such occasions it has been found impossible to maintain liberty on a peace time basis. Such a time was that during which she was making good her astonishing and, as some would say, outrageous decision to cut herself loose, under pretext of the Reformation, from the common civilization of Europe; and again

when it seemed as if she were in imminent peril of being brought back into a Europe united in a new form of revolutionary Catholicism emanating not from Rome but from Paris, the time when Mr. Pitt's government found, or thought it necessary, to suspend Habeas Corpus until the worst of the danger had passed. And unless Mr. Pitt was wrong in wishing to preserve the right of the country to continue in its own way of civilization, it can hardly be denied that he was right in taking the necessary means to that end, and no chances. Better suspend liberty for a few years than allow it to be extinguished for ever.

Exactly the same thing can be said about the hard treatment meted out to those Catholics who, in the reign of Elizabeth, remained loyal to the faith of their fathers; a treatment precisely similar, in principle, to that accorded to suspected fifth columnists in the present war. For that was just what the Catholics were, in the eyes of Elizabeth and her councillors—and for that matter, in the eyes of King Philip of Spain—a potential fifth column. A Catholic rebellion was, in fact, the trump card that Philip was keeping up his sleeve, to play in the event of invasion. No doubt some of the Catholics, in such an event, would have put their queen and country before their religion—but just how many? and which? The government of Lord Burleigh was just as much, and as little, moved by religious considerations as that of Winston Churchill; but faced with the imminent prospect of England “having her neck wrung like a chicken”, it decided that the only way to deal with possible fifth columnists was that which was subsequently to be numbered 18B.

Then, as now, it produced cases of pathetic hardship—that for instance of a stout Catholic gentleman, at the time of the Armada, watching the Elizabethan equivalent of the Home Guard drilling beneath the windows of his prison, and making a heart-rending appeal to the Council to be allowed to serve Her Majesty in their ranks; but being told that the best service he could do was to stay quiet where he was. War is war, and when your national existence is at stake, you cannot carry on with liberty as usual.

And it was only the fact that owing to her insulation, and her navy, such a situation was only felt to arise on very exceptional

occasions, that accounts for England having been able, from King John's day to that of George VI, to make a rule of putting her liberties first, and safety last. And we can say the same thing, with even greater emphasis, about Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States—except that before the transfer of war to three dimensions and the rise of Japan, these peoples have never dreamed of their safety being really threatened on any occasion whatever, exceptional or otherwise. It is possible that future historians of the United States may recognize Pearl Harbour to have had an epoch marking significance more profound than the Declaration of Independence.

For the treacherous raiders had done their work of destruction better than they planned when they blew the bottom out of the isolationist assumption. Never henceforth, until war has been eliminated from human calculations, will Americans be able to take their safety, or their independence, for granted. Though how long it may take for this to penetrate the depths of their national consciousness, and how catastrophic, to themselves and mankind, may be the results of such delay, is a matter about which it is wiser to be reserved than optimistic.

## 2. LIBERTY IN BONDS

We have now to consider those exceptional occasions on which England has been faced, as she is now, with a situation in which some temporary sacrifice of her liberties may be judged the only way of insuring them against final destruction. That such occasions may, and do, arise even for her, no one I think can candidly dispute. Or yet that it is better and braver when that evil necessity is upon her, to accept it candidly, and in time. What really matters is the spirit in which the sacrifice, when it needs must be, is made. For unlike other forms of sacrifice, the merit of this consists in its being rendered as grudgingly, and in its being limited to as short a time, as possible. If any single Englishman is to be parted from the least of his liberties, it can only be because it is one of those cases that do sometimes arise in real life, in which it is necessary to do that which is evil in itself, because it is the only conceivable way of averting far greater evil.

May I take the instance of something that did undoubtedly happen, though it was seldom talked or written about and never officially condoned, during the last war <sup>1</sup>—when some officer, or non-commissioned officer, shot one of his own men who was threatening to start a panic by bolting down a trench at some moment of crisis. As far as I am aware, in the very few instances that this extreme step was actually taken, it was admitted on all hands to have been under the pressure of direst necessity, and, if only for the sake of the victim's own family and good name, was always hushed up. And it is hardly conceivable that the most war-hardened tough would, if he could possibly have avoided it, have done that for which the law decrees the gallows, and admits no plea of military necessity.

But I wonder whether there would have been quite the same tale to tell if there had been official recognition of the right, or duty, of a superior to execute summary justice on one of his own men when, in his judgment, the interests of His Majesty's service demanded it; and had it been known that the law could not possibly call him to account for the *bona fide* exercise of such discretion. Might you not have had cases of what, though not in law, would certainly in fact, have been murder of the foulest description—working off of private grudges or even simple sadism. And whether you had or not, would you not have been bound to get such motives so constantly imputed as to infect the whole service with a spirit of mutiny? But there is no difference in principle between such hypothetical powers on the field of battle, and those which are actually assumed by the authorities on the Home Front, except in so far as rotting for years in a jail without even being able to count the time to one's release, may be judged preferable to the chance of an excited man's weapon inflicting a mortal wound. You may say, of course, that the powers of imprisonment are exercised under the authority of responsible ministers, and after mature consideration by those specially appointed for the purpose. As much might have been said for the operation of *lettres de cachet* and most other arbitrary forms of state imprisonment. And for my own part, I had far

<sup>1</sup> I have not heard of it having occurred under the very different circumstances of this war. But one does not hear everything.

rather take my chance with a casual bully, who after all has got to take *his* of being paid in his own coin by one's comrades on the spot, than face the certainty of living death indefinitely prolonged.

But horrible as such a fate may be, it is part of the greater horror of war, and less frightful than that of millions after defeat. Of that you dare take no chance that you can avoid by any means whatever, just or unjust. Now that the Fifth Columnists and the Quislings have become a prime factor of defeat by undermining resistance and morale behind the front, particularly in the early days of a war, you can take no more chances with them than you could in the days of the Armada. Nor can you stand by till each one of them gets on the wrong side of the law, which it will be the first point of his technique not to do. In the Wild West, you did not wait for a man to shoot; it was enough for him to move his hand towards his gun, and probably sometimes enough for him to look as if he might be thinking of moving it. Here, then, would seem to be a vicious circle—we are fighting for our liberties, and yet once we have drawn the sword, those liberties can no longer be allowed to stand in the way of our will to win. As the Romans had it, *inter arma silent leges*, literally, "among arms, laws are dumb".

Are we then to throw the baby down the drain with the bath water, and to sacrifice freedom in order that the realm may be free? Which is in fact what did happen in most of the countries on the Continent at the beginning of the modern age, when the great standing armies that had to be maintained enabled the sovereigns to turn themselves into autocrats, and crush out the nascent liberties of their subjects; it has happened in the Totalitarian countries of our own time.

But in England it never happened. That was just the decisive difference between her and her Continental neighbours. She discovered the art of suspending freedom to just the extent necessary for tiding over a period of crisis, and no more. That is what gives Henry VIII, with all his sins on his head, his title to rank among the greatest of Englishmen. Never was stricture more inept than that passed on him as a despot and a tyrant. His historic significance consists in the fact that he succeeded in



piloting the country through the supremely perilous crisis of what amounted to the coming of age of her civilization, and the assertion of its independence from that of Catholic Christendom; and that he did so by strengthening and allying himself with those free institutions whose counterpart his brother monarchs were engaged in suppressing in their own realms. He was, whatever his motives, by choice and policy, a great Parliament king. And Elizabeth was her father's daughter in her knowledge of how to work her will *through* Parliament and the laws, instead of riding it roughshod over both. Consequently, in spite of a great many high-handed acts of authority involving grievous injustice to individuals, not only was no permanent injury done to the constitutional liberties of England, but by the end of the Tudor epoch they were far stronger than they had been at the beginning.

We have got to look on the problem of the war time suspension of liberties from this angle. Something of the sort there must be, when it is a question of Total war. And it is impossible to devise any formula by which precise limits may be set to the necessarily arbitrary powers with which the Government has to be armed. It is all a question of the spirit in which the thing is done. Any infringement of those liberties of the subject guaranteed by Magna Charta—"to none will we deny or delay right or justice", is so evil a thing in itself that it can only be justified to the extent, and for as long as, it may be deemed absolutely necessary in order to save us from a defeat that would involve the end of all right and all justice.

But it is an evil to be scrutinized and cut down in every possible way; for there is a fearful danger attached to it, lest it may prove the germ among us of that very tyranny we are fighting to purge from the earth. For the power of arbitrary imprisonment is a terrible one to put in the hands of even the best administration, and involves a perpetual temptation to use it not for the purpose for which it was enforced, but in order to silence opposition, and to put politically and even personally undesirable people out of the way. And it is terribly insidious, since it is only too easy for a zealous administrator to persuade himself that he is acting for the good of the country in having undesirable persons suppressed.

In this connexion I cannot help recalling the story told me

by a certain quite well-known gentleman, who only recently got his release from one of those sentences of imprisonment without trial. As he was never allowed to know even what he was accused of, I cannot in the least pronounce on the reason for putting him out of the way, except that of all the people I have ever met, he strikes me as about the one least capable of conspiring, and still less of conspiring successfully, against anybody. Anyhow, I gather that quite soon after the formation of the present government, he happened to be expounding his views, which are amiably and naively pacifist, to some of his former advanced political associates, now charged with the highest cares of state; and one of them, a very great Personage indeed, closed the debate with, "Look here, so-and-so, you're a very good fellow, but what *you* want is to be shut up." And so, by what appears to be a not altogether surprising coincidence, within a week he *was*!

And even if you should doubt whether this particular story is true—as I for one am quite sure it is—it represents perfectly the sort of thing that is sooner or later bound to occur, perhaps to you yourself, if you are ever unfortunate enough to fall foul of some person of your acquaintance who is now also a Personage, or to evince in your possession what, to such a Personage, may constitute dangerous thoughts.

And it is putting the thing in an entirely false perspective to visualize those who wield such fearful powers merely as patriots, anxiously watching out for the safety of the country. Perhaps even more often they are hard-worked people in administrative jobs, honestly anxious to eliminate nuisances—public, or otherwise. And yet it is the fact that those who have done the greatest things for the country, including the present Prime Minister, are more often than not those who at one time or another have been accounted the greatest nuisances.

### 3. SUPER-MOSLEY VERSUS MOSLEY

But there are other and worse tyrannies even than that of Jacks in Office. For we have seen another sort beginning to emerge, which takes the form of pressure exerted from outside upon those in authority, to suppress, or even to persecute, un-

popular persons. And this sort of thing is the more insidious from the fact that it will usually start with victims for whose unpopularity there is the most argument.

The case of Sir Oswald Mosley will occur to everybody. I doubt if there is any Englishman living for whom I should less desire to hold a brief; and it is fair to say that nothing that has come to him is fit to be compared with what would be the fate of thousands, and perhaps tens of thousands, in an England ruled by him and his Blackshirts. But until that day dawns, Sir Oswald is a British citizen, and is entitled to all those rights and privileges of which he would doubtless deprive his fellow citizens if he got the chance. Otherwise, like Samson, he will have conquered in his fall, and pulled down the whole fabric of his country's liberties on his own body.

I am not suggesting that a man who deliberately elects to run a sort of private army of storm troopers, openly modelled on those from which we are fighting for our lives to purge civilization, has the remotest right to complain if he, and everybody connected with him, are put safely out of the way for as long as the responsible authorities think they would be capable of doing mischief. Nor if he, or anyone else, were to render themselves liable to a charge of aiding or comforting the King's enemies, would there be the least excuse for not allowing the law to take its full and sternest course. But no such charge has ever been brought; and until it is, the presumption is that Sir Oswald is as innocent a man, and as good a subject of His Majesty, as you or I. If he has got to sit still in a cell, he is as much doing his bit for his country, in this highly unpleasant way, as if he were standing at his lathe in a factory. It is an utter mistake—and I think would be libellous—to talk of him as being in any way legally punished, or punishable, until such time as, by the judgment of his peers and the law of the land, he is found guilty. In fact, he is in the position almost of an aggrieved party, and as such entitled to every consideration and indulgence that can be accorded to him consistently with the public safety.

It would certainly have been a horrible thing if he had been allowed to die as the result of his imprisonment, if by any means this could have been avoided. It was therefore not only a matter

of elementary decency and Christian charity, but also of bare justice that, provided he could be guaranteed incapable of doing mischief—no very onerous requirement when invasion had ceased to be a danger, and the man himself was hopelessly sick—he should be allowed to slink away into some obscure refuge, and to take what the distinguished physicians who attended <sup>1</sup> him considered to be an urgently and even vitally necessary course.

But this, which one would have thought the least that could have been conceded by any responsible minister in a free—let alone a Christian country, was, as soon as it was known, greeted with a concerted howl by a not inconsiderable section of the press and public. One would have thought that the Home Secretary had entered into a treasonable conspiracy to sell the pass to Hitler—or more likely to Capitalism, or International Finance, or some bogey of that sort. For the patriotic motive was little more than camouflage. Allies *versus* Axis, or British freedom against Totalitarian slavery, were really side issues: what had raised all this pother was that same cosmopolitan faction fight of Right against Left in which Sir Oswald, before the War, had stood for the symbol of Right. As such, he was accounted worthy of neither justice nor mercy. Let the fellow be dragged back to jail! Let him eat the bread of affliction; let him be deprived of the use of his property and the services of his physicians (wasn't the prison doctor good enough for him—dirty capitalist!); let him, since it was impracticable to lynch him, die and rot, and the sooner the better! The Home Secretary—a Labour man too—how dare he? Let him heed the crack of the whip and come to heel, or worse would befall him! Mobs were gathered together with banners, slogans, and all the customary adjuncts, to clamour for the re-imprisonment, if not for the death, of this untried fellow citizen of theirs. Trade Unions, assuming to themselves more than the power of Star Chamber, pronounced verdict and sentence in one, and demanded its instant execution. It was not obscurely hinted that there might be, if not actual sabotage,

<sup>1</sup> But why—certain friends of tyranny have been brutal enough to ask—allow them to attend him? Why, for the same reason as your doctor or mine is allowed to attend us, if we can afford to fee him. Though I rather fancy these particular doctors were doing it gratis.

at least considerable slackening of the war effort if the victim were not instantly conceded. There were organs of sober and educated opinion that shook editorial heads about the inexpediency of upsetting war-workers at such a time . . .

I cannot help thinking that this was really, if we had only realized it, one of the most critical moments of the whole war. For if this agitation had succeeded, we might almost have wondered whether the war, even if we had won it, would have proved to be worth winning. Whether King Mob would be an easier tyrant to be enslaved by than Führer Hitler may be a matter of opinion and perhaps even of indifference, once the chorus that we were all singing at the beginning of the war can be altered, with truth, to:

" There's always been an England,  
But there isn't going to be one any more,"

and the most appropriate solution would seem to be to take Sir Oswald himself, whose next political incarnation is much overdue, get him to dye his black shirt red, or whatever may be considered the appropriate colour, call him Left instead of Right, and ask him to go ahead with full powers.

But luckily there is no question of this. The light froth of mob oratory was soon blown off the surface, and the great body of sound and national opinion was no more disposed to stand for persecuting the man than it was for lionizing him. Tested on this small, but vitally significant issue, England—old England—rang as true to herself as ever. And as so often before, she found the right man in the right place to speak out for her, loud and bold, as she would have spoken for herself; and there were not a few, I think, who thanked God for Herbert Morrison, at that hour, almost as fervently as for Winston Churchill. It takes a lot for a man who has only got to run in a straight course to have the Premiership in his pocket, if and when there is a Labour majority, to tell a Trade Union in so many words to go to Hell; and for such a man to refuse, when it is a question of justice, to know the difference between his right hand and his left. It is much as if a Conservative minister were to go out of his way to affront the bishops or the brewers. It is, to put it bluntly, rotten bad politics.

But for a statesman whose honourable ambition it is to be Prime Minister of Britain and not a caucus stooge, it may well be a decisive recommendation—and not least with that stout fellow, the British working man, who, in spite of what his pickthanks and crawlers believe, does quite often know a man when he sees one.

#### 4. WAR TO END LIBERTY?

It is impossible, by the very nature of the case, to formulate any rule by which the suspension of war-time liberties may be governed. It is like talking of a law of lawlessness, or order of chaos. Once it is granted that you have got to win at any cost, and that the safety of the state has in the last resort got to override every other consideration, you have put yourself as much above the law as a band of brigands, or a shipload of pirates.

It is not a question of rule, but of breaking rules; and of the spirit in which this, when it must be done, is done. And the spirit in which free men will allow their own liberties to be suspended is one of unqualified regret and aversion. They will never consent to it until they are absolutely forced, and they will strive to limit the evil in every possible way. Where there is the faintest doubt it will always be given in favour of liberty, and a healthy public opinion will be perpetually on the watch, and ready to take up the cudgels for anyone who has even the semblance of being victimized. It will never allow the authorities to take liberties with liberty as a matter of course—it will be perpetually and importunately bothering them with why? *why?? WHY???* And it will insist on knowing the reason why in every individual case.

And it would not be enough for the authorities to take some regulation like 18B, and having got that, repeat it like parrots, and take refuge behind it as a cover from all criticism. Such powers are only conceded for use in the direst emergency, and the burden of proof of such necessity always rests on him that uses them. And woe to him if the necessity cannot be shown!

And again, the man, whoever and whatever he is, against whose rights and liberties these powers are taken, ought to be regarded not in the light of a criminal, but of one who is wronged

—even if unavoidably, and as such deserving of every sympathy and compensation: and this, quite irrespective of whether we like the man himself, or the principles he professes, or what we understand to be his motives. If we saw somebody in the street suffering injury or violence we should, I hope, rush to his assistance even if he happened to be our pet aversion. Our personal reactions to him would cease to count; he would be no longer Alf the Agitator or Charles the Capitalist, but a citizen like ourselves, a member of the same body, whose rights are our rights, and whose liberties cannot be violated without our own being likewise involved. What touches one, in a free country, touches all: he who loves liberty will cherish his neighbour's liberty as his own. For his fate to-day will be yours or mine to-morrow. It is therefore a matter of equal concern to all of us that, in the words of our great Charter, "no free man shall be taken or imprisoned, or dispossessed, or outlawed, or in any way destroyed", except either by due process of law, or under pressure of the very direst necessity; and it is the duty of all good citizens to combine and see that these extraordinary powers are not allowed an inch, or a minute's, more scope than the most urgent consideration of public safety may demand. And though no rule can be laid down, everyone can see for himself how much, in individual cases, this would imply—and how much more than is at present generally conceded. For one thing, it implies that every man who is imprisoned without trial should have the opportunity of knowing, at the earliest possible moment consistent with not giving actual information to the enemy, what is the offence of which he is accused or suspected, and that every loophole or bolthole of official evasion in the matter should be carefully blocked; furthermore, that he should have the right to be represented by a reliable solicitor and to have his cause pleaded *in camera* before the most weighty tribunal that can be constituted. I do not say that there should not be an over-riding power, of the King acting through his Prime Minister, or at least his Home Secretary, to set aside the decision even of such a tribunal, but in that case I think it should be known and published to all the world that the Lord Chief Justice, or whoever it might be, having found nothing in such and such a citizen's conduct "worthy of death or of bonds",

the Right Honourable So-and-so, who, like a Roman Dictator, would be held personally responsible, after the expiry of his emergency powers, for any abuse of them, had taken on himself the responsibility of deciding otherwise. Then honour, which to some men is more even than liberty, would be saved.

Then again, as far as ever possible, the sort of conduct for which a man can be deprived of his liberty, ought to be defined. Otherwise you can be shut up, literally, for anything. An instance comes to my mind of a rather prominent gentleman, whose case I do not profess to have gone into, but whose sole offence, to judge from all that ever gets into the press about him, would appear to be a rabid and fanatical hatred of Jews. Now if ever there was a thoroughly malignant form of obsession, it is that which is called anti-Semitism. Any man who goes about airing it ought to be shut up, in a metaphorical sense, by the loathing and contempt that every decent Englishman feels for this sort of thing. But provided he does it within the limits set by the law, any British Israelite or Goy has just as much right to spread himself out about the unspeakable Jew as he has—and, if he calls himself an intellectual, usually exercises—about the unspeakable Englishman.

Moreover, instead of curbing anti-Semitism, this is calculated to give it a fillip such as could never be imparted by the most importunate crank. For you cannot prevent the wise men in pubs and clubs from wagging their heads over their drinks, and saying:

“Look what these bloody kikes can do—get anyone locked up that tells the truth about them. And of course Winston, you know . . .”

But as what might easily follow would be not only a lie, but also—by due process of law this time—a libel, we will leave it at that. But all Scotland Yard will not prevent the people in pubs and clubs from supplying chapter and verse of their own inspiration.

I do not of course mean that anyone at a time like this has a right to go about using language calculated to start a pogrom. But with that, the law is quite competent to deal. And, apart from the law, in a free country that is in any way worthy of its freedom, it is a safe principle to trust as much, and not as little,



as possible to public opinion. English common sense and sense of fair play are amply sufficient to put the Jew-baiters in their right place without any straining of the law, still less over-riding of it.

But of course you may say: how do you know that it *was* only Anti-Semitism that was, and is, chalked up against this particular victim? How can *he* know it, for that matter? Know it or not, it is always a safe lead in such cases to suspect the worst. And assuming, as I hope I may for the sake of argument, that your victim does happen to be innocent of anything except what the official inquisition chooses to regard as heresy—can a more lamentable fate be imagined not only for him, but for his equally innocent family and relatives?

For this is an aspect that is not always taken into account. Many of these people who are shut up are not what is called capitalists, but working people with families for whom the removal of its head may mean actual disaster. And I am told—what anyone might have guessed without telling—that the blow is often a double one, because the members of these families are apt to find themselves shunned as traitors and fifth columnists, and cold-shouldered out of jobs at the very time they most need them.

I wish that it were possible for the principle to be clearly recognized, not only by the authorities, but by what ought to be their masters the people, that until a man is tried and condemned, no one, not even His Majesty himself, has a right to regard or treat him in any other light but that of an innocent man. If we detain him we are doing him wrong; a necessary wrong, perhaps, but a wrong all the same, for which we owe him—almost—an apology. Whether we like him or not, it is up to us to make up for that wrong by every means in our power. For any injury he may have suffered in mind, body or estate, it is fair that he should receive compensation, to the uttermost farthing.

But if he can be convicted, before a jury of his fellow citizens, of aiding and comforting the enemy, then, in God's name, let him have the reward to which he is entitled—six feet of English earth and as much as may be necessary of English cord—without reprieve or regret.

But however strenuously we try to cut down the sacrifice of war time liberties to the bare minimum consistent with safety,

some sacrifice there has got to be, and in Total war even the barest minimum may be grievous indeed. War and liberty are incompatibles, and it is only the fact that our own insular position has enabled us to hold war—so to speak—at arm's length, that has enabled us to develop liberty to the extent we have. And if the development of the air-arm forces us to live on perpetual guard against a blow to the heart that may be struck without warning at any hour of the day or night, then there will be nothing for it but to cease to be the free country that we have been in the past, and to convert the people itself into a standing army, with discipline never relaxed. Such an army needs a commander—an imperator or emperor; and will, as the danger increases, demand a Total Emperor.

People who sneer at the phrase, used by Mr. Lloyd George—a war to end war, because he, and we, failed to make good his words after 1918, are counselling us to abandon hope. A war that does not end war will end liberty.

Such is the problem with which we shall be confronted, and because it is hard is all the more reason for looking it in the face. Whatever mercy we show—as I trust we shall in fullest measure—and whatever liberties we concede to countries like Germany and Japan, freedom to make war, or to acquire the materials of war, or to foster the spirit of war by any means, open or concealed, is barred for at least as long as any of us, or them, shall live; and it is better to go to any length, even of ruthlessness, than take the slightest chance of what has happened twice already happening again. The peace of civilization must be kept even if we have to make a desert to keep it. Better one country than all; and if that is understood in the proper quarter there need be no question even of one.

## IX

## HERITAGE WITHIN

## I. NO CÆSAR—OR WHICH?

THIS is no ordinary war in which nations are pitted against nations like gladiators in the arena—even though the combatants themselves may be conscious of no other impulse than that of their own will to aggrandisement or self preservation. For this great debate, which is to be decided not in words, but in arms, is one that has been working up to this climax throughout the whole of what we are accustomed to call the modern age, and it is between two orders or conceptions of civilization: the one of immemorial antiquity, and the other of much more recent birth, of which certain nations may happen to be the respective champions and protagonists, but which, if these nations were to perish from the earth, would still stand on their own merits as the two great alternatives before mankind of life or death—the freedom of God's image or the more than slavery of the animated machine part.

To put it specifically, and in terms of Europe, the island has broken away from the continent, and become the nucleus of a new world order based on a new principle of freedom, and standing in mortal opposition to the old order of empire and absolute sovereignty inherited from Rome, and applied to the conditions of the modern age in the form of Total dictatorship.

That, I admit, is too simple a formula to comprehend the whole issue at stake in what is now not a mere European, but a world contest. For there is a third order in the field that is allied with ours, but is certainly not of it, and the adjustment of whose relations to our own after victory will be the *sine qua non* of any peace that is to be either lasting or fruitful. The perfectly candid discussion of which it is as well for more reasons than one to hold over. But there is a hint, and no more than a hint, that may be thrown out towards its elucidation.

I mean that the Roman eagle is double headed. Since the fourth century there has been an Eastern as well as a Western Empire, and since the fifteenth the seat of the Eastern Cæsars or Tsars has been transferred from Constantinople to Moscow. It is there now; with perhaps the greatest of all the successors of Constantine ruling an empire that seems likely, after this war, to stretch from the Pacific to the Vistula, and perhaps even to the Elbe. But in that vast and compact realm there is not the same almost necessary impulse to imperialist adventure that was engendered by the breakdown of Christian unity in the West. There is work enough for a wise Tsardom in putting its own house in order, and in developing its own way of civilization with the ample resources that it already commands, and on principles not hostile, but complementary to, and co-operative with, our own. I say, conditionally, a *wise* Tsardom—and there, for the moment, it may be best to leave it. But even so, we shall have need of an answering wisdom such as we signally failed to evince after the last war, in ordering our own way of civilization, so as to make it acceptable not only for our own peoples, but for those with whom it will be our task, after the war, to unite in free association and equal partnership.

For with the smashing of the Axis, and what we may hope this time to be the complete and irrecoverable fall of Germany as a military Power, there will be no possibility of what is left of Western Europe standing on its own feet. It will consist merely of a number of disjointed national units, none of which after the experience of this war, can be imagined remotely capable of commanding either the resources or the man-power necessary to guarantee its own freedom from slavery—and what a slavery most of them by this time know only too well!

For the German propagandists have this much of truth to work upon. Without the German army, Western Europe, from a military standpoint, is like an arch with the keystone knocked out of it. The idea, that we had after 1918, of the French army being an alternative keystone, is now shown to be a trifle ridiculous. But since it is now proved to demonstration that the German army will be used for no other purpose than to crush those very peoples to whom it might have stood for a bulwark, there is

nothing for us, and for them, but to accept the situation. The old order of Western Christendom, the inheritance of Rome, will be dead and damned. The question "under which Cæsar?" that has been debated ever since the Reformation, will have ceased to admit of any answer, in terms of a *Western Cæsar*. The only question now, for any nation capable of looking the facts in the face, will be "in which orbit?" Partnership, perfectly free and unfettered, in an order of free nations freely co-operating—or absorption in another order, which, whatever else may be said for it, will certainly not be free.

That will be the choice; and it will be for us, who have inherited the order of free civilization, to demonstrate to the whole world that our way is not that of empire or exploitation, but offers the hope of fairer future for all alike than any other. Only thus shall we induce peoples traditionally proud and suspicious of our motives to throw in their lot with us. And that will not be achieved by promises, but by the spectacle of our new order in being and visibly capable of achieving for itself that which it promises to others.

## 2. THE COMMONWEALTH IS WITHIN YOU

When we talk of our new order of free civilization, it is essential that we should realize in what its newness and, in what its freedom, consist, and why it is that we claim that this British or Anglo-Saxon ideal of civilization represents something that has never been tried in the world before; something that before it had grown to maturity had hardly been so much as conceived of.

But perhaps it would be better to start by trying to convey some notion what it does not imply. Because if my own experience is anything to go by, it is almost impossible to speak on these lines without being brought up short against a seemingly invincible incapacity to grasp the notion of any order at all, that is not a modified version of the sort of thing with which the world has been always familiar, and in terms of which every word one can possibly use comes, by time-honoured association, to be interpreted.

For instance, when you talk of the nations of Europe becoming

associated with such a system, nothing you can possibly say will save you from being reminded again and again that European nations will never dream of submitting to any sort of British domination, or to be drawn into the orbit of a British Empire. And it is useless to point out that the idea of a free association of free peoples flatly excludes that of empire or domination of any sort. For even if you succeed in driving this misconception out of the front door, it is smuggled in again by the back, in the form of a *bloc*, or a financial dictatorship, or some sort of economic coercion. And it is useless to protest that the principles of the British Commonwealth, and of any world association into which it may be expanded, are those of the Athanasian Trinity, in which none is afore or after other, none is greater or less than another. It is difficult to see how the proudest nation could sustain any loss of dignity by entering into free and equal partnership with its neighbours, unless the real trouble is that its dignity cannot be satisfied with mere equality, and that unless it is capable of riding its will roughshod over somebody or other, it suffers humiliation. As it would seem that no patriot of Catholic Ireland can sleep quiet in his bed till the last Protestant in Belfast is forced under the yoke, or the patience of Hitlerite Germany would be punctually exhausted every autumn unless some new people could be served up, tastily enslaved, as a main dish at the Nuremburg Festival. And of course, Britain herself does her best to justify the libel by hanging the term Empire like a millstone round her neck, until one almost comes to long for the patriot with courage to up and say, loud and bold, "British Empire, my foot! Don't you know that George III is dead, and the Commonwealth alive?" Which, let me hasten to add, is more than I should recommend any prudent person to do under the shadow of 18B. You never know.

If only it were possible to put our patriotism on to its proper footing, and glory, if glory we must, in having discovered something so much greater than empire, and so far beyond the imperial principle, as to put all empires out of date! Then we should indeed be going the right way to enhance the prestige of our civilization, and to dissipate a misunderstanding that is renewed every time one of our statesmen—and most of all the greatest of them—opens

his mouth in some flamboyant rhetoric about that blessed Empire that shall never, never, never, be suffered to reduce its enormous girth by a single inch.

You cannot have it both ways at once. You cannot, even if you are Hitler, have a *new* order of civilization that is also an empire, because the imperial order is about the oldest there is, and, as many would be inclined to maintain, on its record about the worst.

The imperial principle has got mankind into a blind alley. Either it means you have got to give over the world to a perpetual struggle between vast armed monsters, whose destructive powers grow more and more devastating with every passing year, or else that one of those monsters will devour all the rest, and produce a regime of universal slavery, or living death for mankind—from which even the adjective “living” may be gradually eliminated.

What I have tried to show, and what I want to bring out beyond any possible shadow of misunderstanding, is the way in which our free Commonwealth differs in kind from this time-honoured alternative, and why we call our new order specifically one of freedom, not only in its world-wide but also its domestic aspect.

I have already tried to explain that this order is not to be thought of as a pattern or discipline imposed upon us, but as the united product of all our wills, into which we all grow up together: a living way, not of ruling and conditioning, but of combining all our individual liberties so as to achieve the maximum of common freedom.

Let me put it in another way, when I say that it sets out to achieve social salvation in the spirit in which the Founder of Christianity set out to achieve individual salvation. His Kingdom is not, like our Commonwealth, of this world. But apart from that, all that has been said of the one will equally apply to the other.

And most of all the great fundamental principle—namely that the Commonwealth, like the Kingdom, is within you; that is to say within you and me and each and all of us, potentially at least in its full perfection.

One of the greatest of Christian seers put it quaintly, but precisely, by saying in effect that God could not live for a single

moment without me, that He must give up the ghost if any one of us should cease to exist. And in a like sense it might be said that the freedom of the Commonwealth is shattered the moment you or I cease to be free: if there is one slave on English soil we are all slaves together; if we reach out beyond our borders to impose our yoke on any other people, we fasten that self-same yoke on your shoulders and mine, and on the country itself.

### 3. STATUS OF FREEDOM ABSOLUTE

That analogy between the invisible Kingdom of the soul, and the visible Commonwealth of Nations, is capable of further exploration. For our Commonwealth of Liberty does not spring, like Pallas Athene, full grown and full armed into birth, but is the result of a process of growth, or of what we might call an age-long adventure of self-discovery. That is why it is worse than futile to talk as if it were possible to confer freedom by law or according to any plan or formula. Freedom is of the spirit and it must grow up in each of ourselves before it can be translated into polity. You can strike his chains off a free man, but all the emancipators that ever lived could not confer freedom on a single slave; for if a man is a slave in soul, the first use he will make of his freedom will be to find a tyrant to relieve him of the burden. We have seen this happen in Germany; the modern Germans were not satisfied to have exchanged their Kaiser for a free democracy; they would never be happy till they had got a super-Kaiser whose little finger should be thicker than Wilhelm's loins—and perhaps to not a few Russians, the substitution of proletarian dictatorship for Tsardom signifies that of a strong Big Father for a feeble Little Father.

It is the strength of the British system, that it builds on existing liberties, and never seeks to realize a freedom in the abstract to which it has not grown up in the concrete. And this has produced one very curious result, in that freedom has reached a much more advanced stage among the nations of which the Commonwealth is composed, than among the individuals composing any of these nations. Dominion status might be defined



as that of freedom absolute; the nations on whom it is conferred are united by no other bond than that of the spirit alone, except of course for such covenants of association for special purposes as they may, from time to time, elect to conclude among themselves. It is, in its formal or legal aspect, a consecration of sheer anarchy; one of those things that cannot possibly work, and that both friends and foes, from their respective standpoints, are agreed never will work—and yet defeats all their calculations by holding together with a strength, and working with a power, such as no formal alliance or even empire can surpass.

The bond is one of the spirit alone, and where that bond is lacking, as we can see by the rule-proving exception of Ireland, Dominion Status has no more meaning than if we were to apply the term to that of Germany. The Southern Irish are free, and exercise that freedom, to turn traitors, through their government, not to Britain, but to the cause of free civilization everywhere, by preserving an attitude of neutrality that is not even friendly, and might easily have had the effect, when Britain was almost at her last gasp, of putting the final stranglehold upon her throat. And yet Eire is as much of a Dominion, and as much a member of the Commonwealth, as Canada or New Zealand.

So true is it that without anyone particularly noticing it, this new form of human association that has so long been the wish dream of mystics and idealists, has silently come into being as between nations, which without any law but that of the free spirit can stand together to the death and—we may well hope—to a life on a loftier plane than any achieved in the past.

And it is perhaps natural that communities that had from the first been beyond the effective reach of any sovereignty but their own (and here we see why the case of Ireland was doomed from the start to prove the exception) should, if they combined at all, have chosen to do so on such a basis of unqualified freedom. And admittedly the experiment—surely the most daring ever undertaken on so vast a scale—is yet in its initial stages, and is far from having justified itself by final success. But what has been achieved so far is beyond what anyone, even a century ago, would have regarded as within the scope of credibility. We can only continue, with all our might, and with a faith that though beyond

is certainly not against reason, to build on the foundations so well and deeply laid.

But these few daughter nations have attained to this quintessence of freedom, not because it has been conferred upon them, but because they have grown up to it; and it would be a disastrous fallacy to imagine that any community whose spirit is not yet ripe for freedom can be turned into a Dominion by some charter or act of legislation. You might as well propose to build a steeple from the weathercock downwards. To emancipate in advance of the spirit is to engineer tyranny. We can, and must, speed up the process of growth with a daring proportionate to faith, but not oblivious of fact. We have to be the strategists, as well as the thrusters of freedom. But so far as our will is good and our heart sound, our object will always be to speed the coming of that blessed day when we shall at last be able to say:

"The Empire is dead. Long live the Commonwealth!"

#### 4. FREEDOM UP TO DATE

But within our own shores, and in our relations with one another as individual citizens, no one whose sanity is above suspicion has ever dared to suggest that the time is ripe for the setting up of an ideally free Commonwealth in the sense defined by the Statue of Westminster. Upon you and me and our neighbours no one proposes conferring anything corresponding to dominion status. Our freedom is strictly limited by the law, whether it is that of putting our neighbour to sleep with a bludgeon or merely of disturbing his slumbers by means of a too importunate rooster.

And yet, in so far as we may be permitted to cast our imaginations forward to the goal of the journey, we can never imagine ourselves to be an ideally free people in anything less than a Commonwealth of individuals each as fully his own master and co-operating as freely with all the rest, as the associated nations. And no doubt such a relationship of ordered lawlessness seems as fantastically absurd to us now, between man and man, as it would have to our fathers, between nation and nation. But even if that

goal were infinitely distant, we should have all time before us for progress in freedom.

We can be all the time working for freedom, working up to freedom, and above all, never letting go those liberties which we have got. It is only thus that the spirit will be engendered and fostered by which the coercion of the law will gradually—perhaps over a longer period of time than we can possibly conceive, but perhaps, also, by more rapid stages than we dare to hope—be rendered superfluous.

But though it would be futile to speculate on the time required for the spirit of freedom to render all law superfluous, or even whether the longest imaginable period would suffice for the consummation of such a process, it does not follow that we can afford to treat the time factor as if it were of no importance. Freedom is never a thing that we can take for granted, or allow to stand still. In an age of progress it needs to be continually kept abreast of the time, if it is not to perish altogether. For it is like a bridge that is required to bear continually heavier strains and stresses, and it is not only a question of keeping it in repair, but of continual strengthening and reconstruction. The liberties of our fathers may no longer be to us the bulwarks they were to them, but only a flimsy façade. Every confirmation of charters that is not, in effect, a new charter, is a mandate for tyranny.

And in this age of headlong transition, there is nothing that has been so much in the van of progress as tyranny. Mechanical development has weighted the scales immensely in its favour, by arming it with new powers, and putting resources at its disposal undreamed of before. It has created new demands to satisfy and new problems to solve, that unless they can be mastered in the way of freedom, will undoubtedly be referred to the good offices of a tyrant, who, like Mephistopheles, will stipulate for nothing less than the souls of his prospective beneficiaries. Let tyranny once get the thin end of its wedge fairly inserted, and it is able to drive the rest of it through with the resistless force of a steam hammer. All the old means of upsetting it from below have practically disappeared. The old city mob, that could strike terror into the hearts of kings and governments, has long ceased to be a serious menace even to the police. The barricades in the streets,

the storming of the Bastille, the pealing of the tocsin—such crude remedies are as much out of date as the stone axe. Even the time-honoured expedient of assassination is one against which the modern dictator, with his bodyguard of well-conditioned thugs and his unlimited mechanical resources for the insuring of his precious skin, is practically immune.

But it is not only that the will to revolt can be crushed every time by overwhelming machine-powered violence; it can be cut off at the source, and the people made the propaganda-drunken co-operators in their own enslavement. And even in countries professedly democratic, the average citizen can be subjected to a process of mental enslavement hardly less soul-destroying. For the modern city-dwelling populations are so cut off from access to truth at first hand, and so dependent not only for what they believe, but even what they see<sup>1</sup> and hear, upon highly capitalized and mechanized corporate entities whose interest is to exploit them for whatever they can be made to yield, in the way of votes or money, that it is only by an inherited instinct for freedom perpetually kept alive that they can be prevented from sliding into a condition that differs from that of a Totalitarian Herrenvolk solely as the slavery of the open market differs from that of the overseer's chain-gang.

It will have profited us little to have escaped being a homogeneous horde of Führer stooges, merely to fall into a crazy pattern of newspaper stooges, radio stooges, film stooges, advertisement stooges, caucus stooges, all compounded in different proportions.

So when we talk of bringing freedom abreast of the times, we must remember that its commonwealth is within us, and the freedom for which it stands must grow up spontaneously in each one of our souls before we, as a people, can be fit to receive it. Unless and until we have conquered freedom in ourselves, there is no way in which we can possibly have it conferred upon us. To bring freedom up to date is to bring ourselves up to date.

Now it is essential that we should understand just how much this implies in practice. It does not mean that we have all to achieve ideal or absolute freedom in ourselves. To stipulate that

<sup>1</sup> Still more after the now overdue coming of television.

would be manifestly absurd; such a phenomenon as that of a perfectly free man may conceivably, to those who credit the possibility of a divine Man, have appeared once, but certainly not more than once, in this imperfect world. What it does mean is that there is a certain average level or standard of individual freedom which, at any given time, it is necessary we should attain, if we are to preserve our status of a free people; and that this level, owing to causes that ought to have, but have not, been under our control, has been raised with perilous rapidity in recent times. We have, each of us, to achieve at least that minimum of freedom in ourselves, unless we are all, like so many peoples we have seen, to sink to one common dead level of slavery.

And it is not some speculation of high political theory, but one that can and ought to be translated into the most practical terms. What is to be done, and how are we to set about doing it, if we are to retain our heritage of freedom under the conditions set in the mid twentieth century?

Two principles at least we may accept as fundamental. The first that the source of all liberty is in the individual souls of free men, from which it follows that the conquest of liberty must be made there, and there alone; nor can any conceivable form of state action set us more free than we have already set ourselves.

The second is that we cannot conjure up freedom out of the void by the waving of a magician's wand or pursuit of some abstract ideal. Declarations of the rights of man, formulations of the four, or four-hundred essential freedoms, may have a value not to be despised as propagandist stimulants, but as contributions to the practical task of building up freedom, they are no more than hot air. The British way is not only the best but the only practical way—step by step along the trodden road, stone by stone upon the existing foundations.

## 5. EVERY MAN HIS OWN LIBERATOR

He who broaches the subject of post-war reconstruction is sure to be asked to put down in black and white his plan or programme, as if all that there was to do was to hit upon the right formula and then get it translated into legislative action. Is it

freedom you want? Well then, put your cards on the table—out with your plan, and then we shall know what laws we shall have to pass, besides the ammunition, if we are all to be free.

But to anyone who has grasped the foregoing principles, it will be apparent that this is putting the cart before the horse. It is the men that make the state free, and not the state the men. It was the fallacy of the nineteenth century Liberals that the grant of a free constitution would have an effect similar to that of the marriage service in an old-fashioned novel, of ever free afterwards. The Weimar Constitution of 1919 embodied far more advanced democratic principles than the Washington Constitution of 1788; but the American founders were doing no more than to set down, to the best of their ability, principles that the vast majority of their fellow citizens had inherited from their fathers, and accepted as a kind of second nature; whereas to the great majority of Germans the new freedom was like a temporary lodging in which the German Michael, whose house of bondage had fallen down, pigged it as best he could until a bigger and better permanent residence on the old model could be run up for him. There is a pretty story told of the Moscow December Revolution of 1825, of which the very unplausibly Liberal figurehead was a certain more than usually bestial Grand Duke called Constantine. Certain of the troops had been induced to parade the streets shouting for "Constantine and Constitution", but when some of these honest fellows were asked if they knew what was meant by Constitution, they are said to have replied—"Why, Constantine's wife, to be sure!"

And it may be added that the most successful example of constitutional government in the world is that afforded by Britain, not a single clause of whose constitution has ever yet got on to paper. And what has been said of constitution-making applies equally to every other form of state action. There is no way ever devised in which the burden of liberty can be taken off the shoulders of those who are to benefit by it. Nor is there any conceivable law or charter or plan or programme that can do more than register a freedom that has already grown. That which is good emancipation for one people may not loosen a single chain that binds another. God helps those to freedom who have already

helped themselves. Neither law nor constitution can do more.

Are we then to conclude that neither state nor law can do anything, and that the whole system of representative government has been a fraud and a delusion from the beginning?—in which case we may just as well drop all thought of planned reconstruction, and abandon ourselves to a chaos of unqualified anarchy. That is a question that Tolstoy, perhaps, and one or two other thinkers of note, might have answered in the affirmative. But to do so in England would be to get oneself laughed out of court; and such lawless intransigence would be in flat contradiction of our second principle, for not even Tolstoy could have claimed that this was building on existing foundations. We know perfectly well—and it would be pedantically superfluous to argue—that acts of state have had a great deal to do with our liberties; that the form of the state itself may be reckoned the consecration of these same liberties; and that after the war, by universal agreement, there has got to be state action, and plenty of it, if the peace is to be won. But where, if it cannot confer freedom upon us, or conquer it for us, does the state come in? In what does its part consist? Let us put it this way, that what it cannot do for us, it can help and hearten us to do for ourselves. Its task is to set us free to set ourselves free. It can ensure for each man and each woman of us a fair field and no handicap in the contest; it can bring us up to the scratch in the acme of training and the pink of condition.

Now our forefathers, for many generations back—such of them at least as were not avowed reactionaries—would probably have admitted that this expressed their sentiments with reasonable accuracy. Only to them it would have seemed a much more simple proposition than it is beginning to seem to us. It was first a matter of securing every man in the rights and liberties that were lawfully his; next of putting the guardianship of these same rights and liberties, by such means as the vote and the jury, into the keeping of their possessors; and lastly of gradually and continuously extending the scope of these privileges from a minority to a majority, and finally to all members of the community.

And we must remember that a century ago, even to the extreme revolutionary left wing, as represented by the Chartists, it

seemed enough to confer on every man the same political status as not only every man, but every woman too, enjoys as a matter of course to-day. In that way freedom would be made perfect, and the government being once securely lodged in the hands of the people, all its attendant blessings would doubtless be harvested in due course.

We are wiser now than to believe that freedom is come by so easily. You can put a vote into Everyman's, or Everywoman's, hand, and give them a ballot box to drop it into, without their being much better off, in practice, than they were in the worst days of the rotten boroughs. Between this war and the last a country constituency was, with few exceptions, as much a rich man's luxury as in the palmiest—or perhaps it would be better to say palmoiliest—days of Walpole or Newcastle, the chief difference being that the great majority of them, instead of being seriously contested between the nominees of two parties, were duly filled, after the customary ritual of foregone electoral conclusions, by those of one. There are urban and mining constituencies equally safe for the stooges of the Trade Unions. And in all constituencies alike, the cost to the candidate of purchasing his nomination and bribing the electors, is probably quite as great in proportion as it ever was in the eighteenth century—all the more so, because it is no longer a question of individual but of mass corruption, by way of subscriptions, contributions, and so forth. Unless, of course, as on the Labour side, the candidate cares to submit to being purchased himself and financed by the party caucus at the price of becoming its automatic Yes-man.

The more these things change in form, the more the spirit of them remains the same. You can give one man, or all, whatever political freedom the law can confer, but you cannot give any man the spirit to take advantage of it. That the voter must generate in, and for, himself. The vote merely places political power at his disposal in so far as he has the will or capacity to use it. And of how many electors to-day can it be said that they possess either, in any sufficient degree? The mere fact of getting a free ride to the polling booth in order to make a cross opposite the name of some would-be lobby walker about whom he may know nothing, and who is put up for a policy of which, by the



most blatant advertising ballyhoo, he has been deluded into thinking that he knows something, is hardly enough to turn the voter, either individually or in the mass, into the free arbiter of his country's destiny.

Not that I would presume to make light of those political liberties which have taken so many centuries to acquire, and which represent that part of our national heritage whose outward and visible form approaches nearest to completion. It is surely no small thing that the law should have put the means of freedom at our disposal, and it would be absurd that after the law has thus done its own part, we should tax it with having failed to do that of the spirit as well.

The point is one that I have been trying to drive home with what I hope will not be accounted superfluous re-iteration. Freedom can spring from no other source than that of each man's individual soul. The law can confirm freedom, and define it; state action can implement and arm and harmonize it; but it can no more create it than a motor can generate its own fuel. All the King's horses and all the King's men never have made, and to the end of time never will make, the least of the King's subjects in the least degree more of a free man than he has made himself.

When all the liberties have been confirmed and all the rights granted that human ingenuity can suggest, the liberating authority, whether it take the form of a feudal baronage, or a democratic Parliament, or a patriot hero, can do no more than hand on the task of emancipation to every one whom it may concern—as who should say, in the language of the R.A.F.,

“It's over to you now! Over!”

## X

## WE THE INHERITORS

## I. IMPLEMENTING FREEDOM

IF all that were required for the conquest of freedom were to turn each man loose to conquer it for himself, the task would be simplified beyond measure. But unfortunately it is not quite so simple. The sense in which you set a man free by cutting him loose may well be such as to make a mockery of freedom.

If you and I are climbing the Matterhorn together, and you, being number two of the party, should miss your footing, and hang suspended over the edge of a precipice, incapable of doing any more to help yourself than to keep still, it is of course open to me to say:

"My dear fellow, there is no need to worry. Once I have cut the rope, as I shall now proceed to do, we shall both be free from our present highly inconvenient positions. How you will avail yourself of that freedom it would be presumptuous of me to suggest, but I have enough confidence in your great spirit to feel no fears on your behalf. *Excelsior*, then—if that should be your choice—and *au revoir*!"

But, that, you will probably say, is absurd, and might even be so complaisant as to add that you do not believe that I or any man would be guilty of quite such a dirty trick. But I cannot see that there is so very much to choose in principle between that, and telling a man whose pocket is as understocked as his belly, that it is his own fault if he persists in under-dieting himself when all the restaurants in England are at his service, and to make this the text of a patriotic sermon to the perfectly true effect that the starved cell breeds disease in the social body, and that if the law makes it a criminal offence to eliminate oneself cleanly by suicide (by punishing anyone who fails in the attempt) it ought to visit with far more exemplary penalties him who goes about in a state of partial suicide, breeding mortification.

It was when the machine age was in its first confident dawn, with the motto "every man for himself and devil take the hindmost", that an unregarded visionary called Shelley came out with the wildest of all his many extravagances, in the lines:

"Nay, in countries that are free  
Such starvation cannot be  
'As in England now we see,"

which, as late as 1895, Professor Seeley, justly famous as about the only writer on so-called political science to do so in lucid English, thought to brush aside with the strangely obtuse comment:

"So liberty is actually discovered to be something to eat."

By Seeley, perhaps; but assuredly not by Shelley, whose poetic soul rose up in revolt against the idea of a freedom that leaves any man free to starve. Freedom and something to eat may be as different as you like; but you cannot run freedom on a starvation basis, or even on one of undernourishment, with any reasonable hope of success. And therefore you can take as a working rule—no food, no freedom: with the consequence that he who wills the end of emancipating his neighbour's soul, must likewise contrive the means of filling his belly.

Again it is a prime condition of health in the social body that all its constituent cells, or human units, should be free not only to generate the energy that is the result of food, both bodily and spiritual, but also to harness that energy, as driving power, to some not uncongenial sort of work, practical or spiritual or both combined. Man, unless he is hopelessly undernourished or fatigued, is as much a working as an eating animal; if he cannot find a congenial outlet for his energies, he will provide himself with an artificial substitute in games; frustration of intake he calls starvation and of output boredom, and he abhors the latter as much as the former.

Therefore we can enlarge Shelley's principle to signify that in countries that are free, such unemployment cannot be as we saw in Britain up to the time of the present war, and as we shall see again after it is over, unless we set our faces far more determinedly against it, and contrive much more efficient measures to

prevent it, than ever before. For how can even a limb be free, that is not free to function normally, but only to rot and thereby mortify the body to which it belongs?

"So then," the shade of Seeley might interpose, "it has come to this: that freedom is also discovered to be a job of work!"

Which, in his way of speaking, is just what it has.

You are not solving, but shirking, the problem of freedom, if you stand aside and keep in your purse whatever money you have left, on the ground that neither you singly, nor all of you taken collectively, are your brother's keeper or your brother's employer. Quite apart from the fact that your brother may accept the offer, in default of yours, of some Hitler or Lenin to act in both capacities, you cannot talk of a man as free in any worth-while sense, if he is not free to do a man's work for a man's reward. Whether this is best achieved by state action or a masterly inaction is a question of means whose answer may vary indefinitely according to circumstances; but in one way or another it has got to be done, and that is that.

I have spoken of both intake and output—food and work—as being both visible and invisible, for those of us at least who differ from Karl Marx and the farmyard hog in believing that the life is more than meat, and that the things that no instrument can measure are of greater importance than those that you can touch and see. I mean that a man is a man more authentically by virtue of a full mind than of a full belly; and in fact to any man worthy of the name the filling of the latter receptacle is merely to be regarded as a means to fullness of an altogether different and incommensurable order; a means to be appreciated and provided for scientifically, bearing in mind that too much is hardly less of a fault than too little. The compulsory dieting and sharing of the war would seem, on the whole, to have had all the effect claimed for the best fasting cures, in which rich men pay their physicians through the nose to command them, with more authority than their Testaments, to be temperate in all things—and nobody can deny that we have paid royally for the treatment.

But because the life is the end to which the meat is the means, is all the more reason for perfecting the means to the utmost of our individual and common power.

Education, for example. There is no principle more fundamental, nor more necessary to burn into the soul of every teacher, than this: that there never was nor can be any education except self education; for as the word implies, to educate is not to cram in, but to draw out; to cause a human being to know himself, and to become what he has it in him to be. But it is the task of the educator, whether in the classroom or a government office, to make it possible, and easy, for him to do this for himself. You cannot simply say, as I think Herbert Spencer would have done, that the best the state can do in the matter is to stand aside, and leave the child and his parents to do this for themselves—for the answer is that which Milton puts into the mouth of Belial:

" How they can  
Is doubtful: that they never will is sure,"

nor is it much more to the purpose to drag the child out of a slum, underfed and with leaky boots, into a bleak classroom where one harassed and underpaid teacher gets through his routine grind at the expense of several dozen bored and disgruntled urchins.

Here again the life is more than meat, but if you neglect to take all necessary and appropriate means, by state action or otherwise, to provide the meat, it is going to be a poor look out for the life. I do not say to provide it on a luxurious scale; plain living is notoriously an accompaniment of high thinking. That nobody can doubt who has studied the history of the great monastic orders, which, with all their faults, did more, on a balance, for civilization<sup>1</sup> than, on the most favourable showing, the whole of our modern progress in mechanization. These things are not to be settled off-hand without the nicest balancing of less and more, and on the merits of each individual case. It is the principle that counts, and that I think is clear. Trust in God and keep your powder dry. Look to the end but do not neglect to provide the means. Seek freedom and ensue it, each and all together; but seek it as you would anything else you really want to get, advisedly and scientifically, and in the knowledge that the bee line is not always, or necessarily, the quickest way.

<sup>1</sup> It is more than doubtful whether, without such support, Christian civilization could ever have weathered the flood of barbarism in the Dark Ages. The doubt now is whether it can survive the effects of its own progress.

## 2. PLANNING FOR FREEDOM

I am afraid it will be said, at this point, that in the name of liberty I have been making out a complete case for social-, or whatever the 'Ism may be that goes in for doing everything by state action, and putting the whole country, and everybody in it, into a sort of bureaucratic strait waistcoat. That would be a reduction to absurdity indeed.

The habit of mind that expresses itself in the demand for patent remedies, and formulas and plans of all sorts, is so deeply ingrained that it is almost impossible to get oneself taken really seriously when one says that the all-important thing is to get the spirit right, and that once this is done the planning is a secondary task that the ordinary citizen would in most cases do well to turn over to his experts. For the sort of sweeping generalizations by which these problems are simplified for purposes of working up a party team spirit are, as a rule, the sort of half truths that are far more dangerous than good, thumping, and therefore exposable, lies. We are all socialists, in the sense of that Protean word in which it implies belief in the efficacy of state action; and those of us who are fit to bear the name of Englishmen are at least as much anti-socialists in a perpetual healthy suspicion of every form of state, or any other action, that may tend to the abridgement of any of those liberties that they already possess, or might enjoy but for such action.

That, as I say, is the spirit, that it is every good citizen's first duty to keep in a state of perpetual and even aggressive vitality. It is up to him to let everybody concerned, from the highest in the land to the social expert who comes snooping round after his (or more probably her) private affairs, know what results he expects to get from their activities, and what are the limits beyond which he is going to dig in his toes, and fight to the last ditch, against their application to himself.

But by what ways and means this spirit of freedom is to be implemented in any particular case is a matter to which the current shibboleths and slogans are mischievously irrelevant. You might as well, and certainly to the great relief of the caddies,

have 'one-club parties among golfers—the hundred-per-cent woodenizers, furiously trying to get out of bunkers and hole putts with their drivers, and the anti-woodenizers driving with their putters off the tee; with perhaps a further complication of everyone being either a Rightest or a Leftist, and consequently having to grasp his club in all cases with one hand. But your golfer is, as a rule, wholly absorbed, *pro tem*, in his game, in which he differs from the average citizen, to whom the game of shaping his country's, and the world's, destinies, has to be simplified and gingered up artificially to make him devote even a hundredth part of the attention to it that he does, say, to football. And consequently the golfer, unlike the citizen, provides himself with the requisite number of clubs, and knows that the choice of any one of them depends upon a variety of considerations that vary indefinitely with each particular stroke. He does not envisage the problem from the standpoint of a left-handed woodenist, or a right-handed mashieist, or of the alternate-handed new Putterwealth party, but simply of a man who knows what hole he wants to get to, and means to get there in the fewest possible strokes, according to principles that ought to have become a second nature to him, such as steadying the swing and keeping his eye on the ball. But the golfer has this advantage over the citizen: that though he may—and wisely—take the expert advice of his caddie about the choice of a club for some particular lie, that choice is a matter entirely within his own province, unless he is such a hopeless duffer as not to know the use of one club from another. And no doubt, in the pre-mechanized age, the commonsense of the ordinary educated man was as capable of appreciating the issues at stake on most practical questions of policy as any statesman or specialist; especially as many Englishmen's temperaments and experience have combined to produce a healthy belief that whoever else is in the right, the man in authority is usually wrong.

But it is one of the penalties of mechanization that it has increased the complications of life to such an extent, that without far greater knowledge of the facts, and time to work out all their delicate cross currents and repercussions, than the ordinary man can hope to possess, any opinion he can form on whether a given

object is most likely to be attained by means to which he would affix one of his customary labels of socialist, capitalist, and so forth, is worth as much, and as little, as one that he might pass on some problem in astronomical mathematics or the latest developments in organic chemistry. And as all these labels are equally out of date and useless, he has not the chance of picking the right one even by luck.

We must choose our rulers as we do our doctors, not with a view of prescribing their prescriptions for them in advance, or tying them down to some fixed line of treatment, but because we know what we want them to do for us, and can form our own judgment on whether they are giving us good value for their fees, and whether they are the sort of men to give it. And if we feel that they are not up to justifying, or, still more, that they are abusing our confidence, then we are free to change our doctor, or, in case we are merely in doubt, to take as many more opinions as we need to satisfy ourselves.

Naturally the more attention we devote to these matters, and the more pains we take to explore all sources of information available to us, the better chance we shall give ourselves of preserving that most essential part of our freedom which consists of our being the masters and not the slaves of our experts. And we shall avoid the temptation, into which there seems only too much tendency to fall nowadays, of treating their reports and plans in the light, not of provisional conveniences, but of infallible truth, not to be modified or criticized, but passed into law to the uttermost letter. Already we are having a hundred-per-cent acceptance of the Beveridge report made a touchstone of political soundness, and this is having its natural counterpart in the emergence of a budding faction of equally uncompromising anti-Beveridgites—and I think it would be safe to say that less than one per cent of either side has gone through the labour of procuring, reading, weighing, digesting, and to the best of his ability checking up, clause by clause, on that necessarily tough and complicated document. Though I may say that the wide sale it has had is one of the most encouraging signs of political self help and goodwill that we have to bank upon.

For it is a question, in the last resort, of good will. Professor



Beveridge is not an infallible Pontiff,<sup>1</sup> and it is a mere crazy inversion to talk of his report as if it were a sort of Athanasian creed, which except a government or a nation swallow whole and undefiled it shall without doubt perish everlastingly, and serve it right. It would be to assume that every Tom and Dick and Joan and Bunty were so much better informed and equipped than he as to be warranted in appending their *imprimatur* and *nihil obstat*, with inquisitorial authority, to every detail of his conclusions.

But it is carrying it a little too far, when we find it brazenly proclaimed, in editorial columns, that the public, or the people, is clamouring for the instant and total implementation of other reports that to the vast majority of male voters are no more than names, and of female voters, not even that, and which—to judge by my own experience—the most intelligent bookshop managers are usually unable to identify, or when helped to do so, to procure. It was on a slightly mellow Lord Palmerston that a no doubt libellous cartoonist fathered the famous admission: "What humbugs we all are!" If Pam were alive now, he might say it on ginger beer, if he could get any.

It all boils down to a question of good will. Such a momentous document as that associated with the name of Beveridge (or for that matter of Barlow, or Keynes, or Scott, or Uthwatt) needs to be scrutinized and scrutinized again before it is translated into the law of the land—most of all does it need to be gone through with a fine comb to make quite certain that in the long run, and taking everything into account, it will tend to the maintenance and increase of our British liberties, and that any apparent or temporary sacrifice of them will be much more than atoned for in real and ultimate gain.

And to those who object that the Beveridge or any other plan will leave us less free, on the balance, after it than before, it may be freely conceded that if it really is so, then, and to that extent, the thing will have to be done in some other way. But done it will have to be, and a way will have to be found. For, as I have said, it is a question of good will, or—if one may put it that way

<sup>1</sup> Though to judge from some of his recent recorded pronouncements, even Professor Beveridge would seem to be developing a certain touchingly human tendency towards becoming the fundamentalist of his own scriptures.

—of harmonizing two good wills, the one to liberty, and the other to the end envisaged in the report in question. Like our golfer, we may decide that the club handed to us by our otherwise excellent caddie is not the one we want for that particular stroke, and ask for another; but our object is still to get to the hole in as few strokes as possible, and we are not looking for an excuse to give up the hole altogether.

The only thing that is fixed and unalterable about all these plans and reports is what they are meant to do—not the way they set about doing it. They are part of the practical and most necessary work of adapting our ancient liberties to modern conditions; of bringing them up to date in a necessary hurry and within an inexorable time limit. Even should the Beveridge way, the Uthwatt way, and all the other ways prove, on closer examination, to be fatal blind alleys, that would be only the more reason for buckling to the task of discovering, and taking, the right one to the self-same destination. For without social security and freedom from want, without a population rationally distributed, or cities orderly planned, or the land used to the common advantage, or a circulating medium that is both efficient and honest, or an education capable of providing everyone with the means of improving his own special talent to the uttermost, or any one of a score of other things one could name, you might as well expect the modern man to achieve freedom, as to climb a cliff with a millstone round his neck. First take off the millstone, and then, and not till then, you have a right to say to him:

“Now you have had everything done for you that can be—so up you go, and if you don’t arrive, you have no one but yourself to blame.”

To discuss the merits of these schemes, or to put forward alternatives of my own, would be presumptuously irrelevant. I am writing about our heritage of liberty, and not ranging over the whole vast subject of social adjustments that though they may be the necessary, are still but the indirect means to its preservation.

But as far as my own opinion may be worth stating, I cannot help feeling that the general principle—I do not say the detail—of these reports is not only thoroughly sound, but, in the best sense,

English. They are bold, factual attempts to fit practical solutions to practical problems. Like Dr. Rumbold's famous pills, they don't go fooling about, but attend strictly to business. They breathe an air of most refreshing freedom from 'isms and 'ologies of all kinds. They are neither Right nor Left. They do not, as far as I remember, propose so much as to preserve or to abolish or do anything in particular about the capitalist system. And whether their conclusions should turn out to be right or wrong, they do at least appear to me to be setting out to do the right thing in the right way, and that is more than can be said for any of the party or ideological nostrums at present on the market.

### 3. THE THREE STAGES OF LIBERTY

Planning we have got to have; in a machine powered environment you cannot dispense with exact and foreseen co-ordination. But the really crucial consideration to which it all comes down, is—to what end are you planning? and in what spirit?

Because if planning were the open sesame to social salvation, there would be no particular reason for ascribing greater virtue to British civilization than to the new order against which we are contending. In fact the advantage would seem to be rather the other way about, since the German mind takes more kindly to planning than the British. All, and more than all, the things at which we are aiming, Hitler offers to do for his Herrenvolk with Teutonic efficiency—to feed them, employ them, plan their cities, arrange their holidays, provide them with all the conveniences of life from slaves to motor cars, and all its amenities from pageants to pogroms. It is the old Roman offer of bread and circuses brought up to date.

The Englishman is no despiser of food and is notoriously fond of his amusements, but he is not prepared to be bribed by these into giving up something he has learnt to value even more. He must be free or die, because, spiritually, the want of freedom is death. Consequently, unless he is false to his traditions, he is not prepared to accept either the necessities or the amenities of life at the price of his liberties.

And it is by this test that every plan and every measure of reform must stand or fall. Does it make for freedom? And, since freedom is not a formula but a spirit, this is to say—is it inspired by the spirit of freedom?

The spirit of freedom, the good will to freedom—let that be kept alive, and your planning will go right of its own accord. But to keep it alive under the conditions of the new age, and harness it to the machinery of that age—that is the great and the supreme thing needful.

That spirit is not something which can be conferred from above, but must grow up out of each one of us. The Commonwealth is within us; you and I are the sovereignties in miniature of which it is composed, and like the nations of the "Empire", need to be perpetually striving to fit ourselves for an ultimate, free dominion status, in which the law shall be superseded, and the only bond shall be one of spontaneous co-operation.

Such co-operation is the only way in which freedom can be made perfect, or a working proposition at all. The dictators will say that the only way to get people to combine, and especially under mechanized conditions, is to plan *them*, and force them to conform to the plan. Ours is for them to combine of their own free accord.

For if it does not bear fruit in combined action, freedom is merely stunted and sterile. It is far above the sort of individualism that is supposed to consist in every man's following his own more or less enlightened self interest. No doubt freedom, and certainly freedom in England, began at rock bottom by securing every man by law in his individual rights. But least of all at a time when the part of charity in the social system was more explicitly recognized than to-day, could there be any question of its stopping there. For freedom is made perfect in charity.

There are, in fact, three stages in the conquest of freedom. The first is that of every man standing out for the uttermost letter and uttermost farthing of his lawful rights—the dogged intractability and litigiousness of the typical John Bull, that may not have rendered him always the most urbane or pleasant of characters, but has made him too tough a nut for any tyrant, domestic or foreign, to crack. That is the foundation on which all the rest

is built: every free man a separate pillar of liberty defined and concrete, guaranteed by the law.

But that is no more than the groundwork, or the crypt, as one might say, of the edifice of liberty. We cannot build a free commonwealth by simple persistency in having the law on our neighbours. The spirit behind the letter of the law is that we should respect other peoples' freedom as much as our own. That is what is meant by our being law-abiding citizens. It is what in the wider sphere is meant by our being a law-abiding nation: a sense, bred in the bone, that he is cursed who removeth his neighbour's landmark, that every inhabitable tract of God's earth, large or small, is some potential Naboth's vineyard, to violate which, in plain English idiom, is not done; a belief that my neighbour's liberties cannot be violated without my own being equally called in question, since there can be no free world for any people, that is not equally free for all peoples. For the freedom of one can only be made perfect in that of all.

That we may call the skeleton, or solid framework of liberty. But there is a third stage necessary to complete the structure, though it is not always easy to say where the one ends, and the other begins. But the real distinction is between the negative, or static defence of liberty, and the positive and dynamic will to deepen the conception of it and to enlarge its scope in every possible way. It is the distinction between asking—what has my neighbour the right to expect from me? and—what good thing can I have the privilege of contriving for my neighbour?

And it is these three stages in the conquest of liberty that every man has to achieve in himself before he is fit to take his place as a free citizen in a free Commonwealth; that is what is implied by saying the Commonwealth is within us, and it is not until it is thus grown up within each of us that it can grow up together out of all of us into a free people, or a free Commonwealth of Nations.

#### 4. THE FOUNDATIONS STAND

It cannot be too clearly emphasized that there neither is, nor can be, any question whatever of putting into effect some

patent formula or blue print of liberty in the abstract. We cannot build our house of freedom on a vacuum, nor, in the time we shall have at our disposal, can there be the faintest question of our starting to lay the foundations on some virgin site. We should want more centuries for that than we are likely to be granted years. We can only build on what we have, and what we are, already.

If therefore we are to take the only too easy line of making out that a mechanized, or urbanized, populace has already lost that sturdy independence that one associates with the terms "old" or "merry" England, and that we are already a megalopolitan crowd of mass-conditioned Robots, there is nothing more to be done about it except lay down our arms, scrap our planning, and resort to some friendly gas oven while the going out of the world is comparatively good.

We must face the facts, even about ourselves; but we need not assume this to be the same thing as facing the worst. Whatever handicaps and difficulties the conditions of our age may have imposed upon us—and God knows they are heavy enough!—no one, not even our enemies, can seriously imagine that they have yet made of us a degenerate people, a populace ripe for slavery. Whatever may have been suspected after Munich, there has been no question of that since Dunkirk. The qualities are there: the only question is whether they can be kept continuously in play, and whether they are good for keeping alive our liberties on the home front as well as against the enemy.

Now I dare to submit, that taking everything into consideration, and in comparison not only with other peoples, but with our own past record, the spirit of British liberty has stood the test both of new conditions, and war conditions, far better than most people would have expected. It would be childish to suppose that in a war whereby our life and soul have been brought into more imminent peril than at any time in our history, some suspension of our liberties should not have been found necessary. What is remarkable is that it should have been kept within such reasonable bounds as, on the whole, it has. Once you get such a freezing of the process of representative government as is involved in the cutting off of Parliament from the electorate, except for an occa-

sional by-election framed up in advance, as far as may be, by the official parties; and when you have, among other extraordinary powers granted to the executive, that of arbitrary imprisonment, you have all the conditions set for a landslide into tyranny.

But though there have been regrettable, and perhaps even scandalous incidents; and though there is reason enough for preserving the most jealous vigilance, no one can fairly say that the situation as yet shows the least tendency to get out of hand. Parliament, in spite of its præternatural age, shows no signs of any flagging in vitality, and is not likely to under the leadership of so great a House of Commons man as the present Prime Minister. Even that fearful power of the *lettre de cachet* conferred by 18B has been remarkable for the sparingness with which it has been used, and the jealous vigilance with which, throughout the whole length and breadth of the country, its application has been scrutinized. It is hardly even alleged that the supreme danger has materialized (except possibly in the cases of one or two obscure victims who were even more obnoxious to the mob than to those in authority) of its having been diverted to the uses of a political weapon. The hard-pressed ministers, being human, must sometimes have felt a sneaking wish that it were possible thus to shut up one or all of those political adventurers whose game it is to maintain themselves in the limelight, by arrogating to themselves a function corresponding to that of the fool, in Renaissance courts, who was licensed to blurt out the most scarifying lampoonery about the highest in the land.

But it has never been suggested that even the Prime Minister himself, though he is the last man to take this sort of thing philosophically, has ever contemplated clipping the wings of even the most outrageous of these gadflies by a "prison crop"; or that even if he wanted to, he would dare; or that if he dared, even he could get away with it. The whole press and country would certainly be in an uproar at the bare suggestion.

The test case I have already mentioned, of Sir Oswald Mosley, shows that even when the temptation was strongest for inserting the thin edge of the tyrannic wedge—for what more plausible prescription could there be for a would-be dictator than his own? the heart of the country was sound; the agitation for cancelling

his release subsided even quicker than it had been frothed up, and it is now left to those who chalk on walls to persist in their indomitable ukase:

### PUT MOSLY BACK.

Even now, when the compulsion of the individual citizen has been carried, without protest, to greater lengths than ever before in our history, I do not suppose there has ever been a time when public opinion has been so awake and alive to the need for preserving our essential liberties, or so conscious of the distinction between the cruel necessity of their suspension for war purposes only, and what would be the unendurable outrage of allowing such liberties to go on being taken with liberty for one single moment longer than necessary. However else we may object to "As before" for a post-war slogan, we can all heartily subscribe to "Liberty as before, and rather more than before". And to that I think public opinion, in so far as it may be presumed to have a voice, would breathe a hearty Amen.

Even the press, whatever else may be said against it, is on the whole a bulwark of individual liberty, not so much on principle, as because every journalist knows that there is nothing that stimulates such violent, and therefore sale-producing reaction, as the very idea that some poor or defenceless individual is being bullied or put upon by those in authority. I remember the editor of one of the most famous popular weeklies saying to me in his office, with reference to some proposed article:

"Oh well, if you can work it up into a grievance, grievances are what we live on!"

And though the licence granted to pressmen to violate, with impunity, all the most cherished sanctities of private life, constitutes a standing crime against freedom—guarded, as it is, by an invincible conspiracy of silence; yet the graver danger of the Fourth Estate, through its bosses, assuming effective sovereignty of the realm, has been foiled by the simple refusal of the public to stand for it. All the technique of mass conditioning could not jockey a Press Baron into the Premiership—as at one time seemed quite on the cards. And that is a notable point scored for British freedom.



Another bulwark of liberty is to be found in the judicial bench. For the judges on the whole, and particularly one or two of the most forceful personalities among them, have been watchful to check any threatened encroachment on the liberties of the subject, and there has been some scathing judicial comment on the stretching of 18B. The now famous Hereford birching case shows how judges of the High Court can be so moved with spontaneous indignation at the alleged arbitrary treatment of humble folk by the magistrates and police, as to treat these functionaries to what now appears to have been an unwarrantably severe wiggling; though a rectification of the scales, at the hands of another judge, was neither denied, nor very long delayed. The whole episode, even in its incidental errors, shows that the public heart, and the judicial conscience, are fundamentally as sound as ever on the need for keeping the simple folk by their right and defending the children of the poor, which is after all no inconsiderable stage on the road to liberty.

If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do? But the foundations stand. Whatever else the mechanization and urbanization of British life may have done, I do not believe that they have weakened in any way that will to liberty which we have inherited from our fathers. But they have made it incomparably more difficult to translate into action. It is not enough for us to be the men our fathers were. We have got to be far better men if we are to preserve, under trials such as they were never called upon to cope with, the heritage they have bequeathed us.

But that heritage and birthright is ours here and now, and there is no call upon us to create or even to restore, but only to maintain and develop it. And that, though hard, need not be impossible—and it is part of the tradition we have inherited not to know when we are beaten.

## 5. NECESSARY TRUCE

I am far from trying to make out that there is the least excuse for complacency, or that all things are working together for freedom in the freest of all possible Britains. Quite obviously they are not; and as long as these two evil and kindred forces that are

indicated, rather than defined, by the sense imparted to the terms Right and Left, continue to dominate thought and generate team spirit, so long there can be no security for freedom; for these two, which are only two as are the heads and tails of the same coinage, are the mortal enemies of freedom, and will never rest till one or other of them has wiped its last traces from the face of the land.

And if it be asked to what party or quarter this is addressed, I would answer—decide for yourself. If you accept the principle, you are not bound by my application of it. By their fruits ye shall know them.

“Right” is known to us all, and even its opponents use the name as interchangeable with Fascism. And in so far as the Conservative or any other party can be convicted of open or secret collusion with Fascism, to that extent it will be damned with the curse of Quisling by all freedom-loving Englishmen. But such a charge has got to be proved up to the hilt, and mere railing accusation, though it may bring grist to party mills, serves to render it less, rather than more, probable in the judgments of those who dare to think for themselves. But though, for reasons I have given already, it seems to me that such a charge, levelled against the Conservative party as a whole, is disingenuously unpalatable, the utmost vigilance is required, if only in its own interests, lest there should be any pockets or cells of the genuine “Right” lurking within its pale. One frequently hears stories of such and such a “Set” magnified by gossip until one would imagine that we had an open fifth column in our midst. If you ask who the Set consists of (bar, perhaps, the owners of the house or houses in which it is located), or what precisely are its beliefs and objects, or how it has pursued them in the past and proposes to do so in the future, you are met with some such convenient evasion as “well, of course, one can’t give exact chapter and verse, but everybody knows . . .”

Well, so do not I, nor, I fancy, do you; and you may very well say that it is no business of either of us to find out—in which case it is still less our business to talk as if we had. But if I were one of those responsible for the destinies of a great, historic party, I should feel it to be my very first business to sift every one of these stories for any modicum of substance it might conceivably con-

tain, since the least injection of this germ might infect the whole body with its own corruption. For neither Conservative, nor that fine old word Tory, have the least shadow of connexion with what is now signified by Right; and once such a connexion could be established with any plausibility, no one would take any more seriously the claim of the Conservatives to be a national party, than that of the Liberals, ever since their unhonoured bargain to enslave Protestant Ulster, to be more than a purely opportunist faction of factions, conspicuous for anything rather than the cult of liberty.

The "hard-faced" men, the diehards, the Blimps, the profiteers, Big Business, High Finance: it is with such real or imaginary entities that its enemies—with reason from a Machiavellian standpoint—seek to identify the party now led by Winston Churchill. And if that party should yield the least fruit of justification to such suspicious, that would be its funeral. And surely, by this time, it has been warned enough!

For all these things are against liberty—and a party that reposes its credit on being national and conservative of ancient tradition, must, for that very reason, be the guardian of our ancient and living liberties, because our national tradition is before all else one of liberty. To say conservative is to say liberal, and equally to say progressive, because to be conservative of growth is to continue growing.

I think that of recent years the graver danger to liberty has in point of fact—there is no necessity in point of principle—been from the other side. Official Conservatism has never admitted to being a class party of the Right, but Labour has often tended to glory in being one of the Left, and imbued with Left principles which, like those of the Right, have no roots in national tradition, and no regard for liberty in the British, or indeed any, sense of the word.

However unwilling the leaders may have been, it can hardly be denied that official Labour allowed itself to be drawn, or jockeyed, into engineering a hold up of the country under the guise of a general strike, the success of which could only have resulted in superseding the authority of Parliament by a dictatorship of the Trade Unions; and of supporting this by the happily

unparalleled outrage of muzzling the whole of the press with the exception of their own propaganda organ, than which Mosley himself could have done no damner! It has connived at such flagrant violation of the liberty of the subject as is implied in the right of a Trade Union to force a man to contribute to the support of a Parliamentary candidate whose politics he may detest, under pain of becoming an economic outlaw and blackleg. And certainly its acknowledged intellectuals have used language implying that if Labour were ever to get a clear majority at an election, it would take steps to see that such verdicts could never be reversed, as the result of any subsequent appeal to the people—which of course would be the Left equivalent of a Nazi Enabling Act. Certain of them have not spared to go the whole hog by proposing to get rid even of the pretence of Parliamentary control, and legislate by Orders in Council—or the ukases of their party bosses—for ever and a day! And this in the sacred name of democracy!

I do not say that it is any more necessary for Labour to mean Left than for Conservative to mean Right; but that Left and Right, in the up-to-date acceptation, signify alternative forms of tyranny; that where either of them prevails, liberty cannot be; and that consequently every Englishman of good will is bound to hate any party that identifies itself with either, as he hates hell or Hitler. How far either party allows that cap, or shirt, to fit, is for itself to decide.

It is in that light that we have to view the whole vexed question of party politics after the war. I believe that there is hardly a thoughtful or patriotic person in the country who does not view, with a horror almost amounting to despair, the prospect of the old team spirits being stoked up as before at full blast, and caucuses being pitted against each other like military machines in Total warfare; or who does not feel that the faction fight that had to be suspended to avoid losing the war will, if it is resumed, render hopeless any prospect of winning the peace. And yet nobody has the least idea how it is to be avoided, especially as it is almost impossible for the ordinary citizen to look this question fairly in the face, because whenever he tries, he finds himself gazing into an artificial fog of journalese *clichés*.

“ Coalition ” is one of these, and “ coupon ” another; and the repetition of these is always considered good for a hundred-per-cent argument for a hundred-per-cent faction fight. And yet some form or other of coalition in power, ever since Parliamentary government became a reality, has been not the exception, but the rule in England. The great Whig party that governed England under the early Hanoverians was itself a coalition of the most diverse forces, and few governments in the eighteenth century (the chief exceptions being the fatal government of Lord North and the pre-revolutionary administration of Pitt) were anything else. After that it was principally a series of Whig-Tory, Whig-Canningite, Whig-Peelite coalitions, crystallizing by imperceptible stages into unity; and then, after a Dizzy-Gladstone interlude of real party pendulum-swinging, a return to Liberal-plus-Unionist coalition, followed by war-time coalition, post-war coalition, and, after an interval, a restoration of the Liberal-plus-Unionist model under the style of a National Government, and supported in the country by record majorities. And even when you have not had coalitions in the Cabinet, there have most often been coalitions supporting the Cabinet, of Liberal-Irish, Conservative-Liberal-Unionist, Liberal-Irish-Labour, and finally Liberal-Labour. Of course it is no good pointing out about a *cliché* that it is nonsense; neither the grey African nor the green human parrot parts so easily with his *repertoire*. But there it is.

As for coupons, what officially sponsored candidate is there who is not a coupon candidate? and why does the coupon of a caucus cease to be a coupon, when it commits its holder, if elected, to tramp the lobbies at the whip-crack of a Conservative Coodle, or a Liberal Doodle, rather than that of Coodle-cum-Doodle aligned against the Labour Foodle? Or, for that matter, of Coodle-cum-Doodle-cum-Foodle against all the other Oodles? That the term happened to be appropriated to Mr. Lloyd George's justly discredited attempt to exploit demagogic sentiment after the last war, is no reason for using it as a veto on any attempt to maintain national unity after this. Nor is there any reason, except our own mental inadaptability, for assuming that arguments that even in the past were not valid without a great deal of qualification, should carry infallible conviction now. Is it likely that

the immensely complicated issues at stake in modern politics can be simplified in each case to a direct and emotionally stimulating black-white, yes-no, clash of opposites? Or is not the result more often to divert attention altogether from the real task in hand, and to confront Parliament and the country with a choice of false solutions, equally absurd and equally tragic? A glaring instance of this was that of Ireland, in which the Conservatives committed themselves to the denial to the Catholic nation of freedom from the British yoke, and the Liberals, by way of counterblast, to the criminal adventure of forcing the Catholic yoke on the Protestant nation. Another case is that of education, almost every attempt to reform which has been side-tracked into Total war between the Pharisees of the Churches and the Sadducees of the Chapels, who ought to have had their bigoted heads knocked together, and to have been told to keep out of school until they had schooled themselves to compose their differences like Christians. But it is far more easy to froth up party enthusiasm out of old and indurated hatreds, dating back to Cavalier and Roundhead times, than out of the vitally important tasks confronting the modern educator.

It is difficult to think of any one of the major tasks of post-war statesmanship that lends itself to the purposes of a party duel, or can be handled in this way without resolving it into a conflict of rival absurdities. Our new age is not one of plain yeas and nays, so much as of infinitesimal shades and differences of less and more. The idea that a scheme like the Beveridge, for instance, can be debated with profit between impassioned teams of swallows and abhorers, is more worthy of Colney Hatch than of Westminster. Whatever else may or may not be the case about blue prints, it is certain that to thrash them out in this way would be to thrash them to death. And yet this is just the way that the advocates of a hundred-per-cent resumption of party warfare do propose to thrash out the blue prints, or plans, or whatever you like to call them, of post-war reconstruction.

I find it hard to believe that one person in a hundred can doubt that when, at the supreme crisis of the war, the three parties resolved to sink their differences and pool their energies in the one task, on which all were agreed, of winning it, the right thing

had been done, and they had gone no inconsiderable way towards winning it. Is there the least reason to believe that the task of winning the peace will be any less arduous? It will be even more so, and we have precedent for failure. Or that the results of losing it, this time, will be such as to give us another chance?

The threat of a surrender to Hitler could not be more deadly than that of a sudden dissolution of national unity immediately after *his* surrender, and the consequent rush to return to that state of things and of mind that but for a miracle would have enabled Hitler to carry out the programme, actually formulated by one of his ministers, of literally exterminating the whole British stock.<sup>1</sup> For we shall be living at least as dangerously—make no mistake about that—after this war as we were before, or even during it.

## 6. MEN OF GOOD WILL

After the war, there will be only two kinds of Englishmen: those of good, and those of ill will. The distinction between them will not follow any of the recognized party lines. Those of ill will will endeavour to divide the country in a civil war, more or less disguised under constitutional forms, between kindred and cosmopolitan ideologies—Right against Left. The victory of either would signify the enslavement of the country from within, though it is overwhelmingly probable that before this could happen, their conflict would have resulted in its enslavement from without.

Those of good will recognize that what they have, and seek to attain in common, immeasurably transcends in importance that which divides them. All alike stand for the same ideal of civilization, the same Commonwealth of free peoples of which England can claim to be the prime begetter, and whose spirit lives and thrives only in those of its individual members. All are the inheritors of that spirit, and all guardians of its heritage of liberty.

If we have that uniting us, we shall see that the differences of party need, and ought to be, no more than differences of emphasis

<sup>1</sup> Except, I believe, for a million selected Nordic-looking women, to be kept in special stud farms to be raped by Germans, until such time as they had produced a sufficient number of babies to repeople this island with a hundred-per-cent guaranteed Nazi population.

on, or awareness to, one or other essential aspect of this same problem of liberty. A man of good will and comprehensive mind might very well claim to belong to all three parties at once. As a Tory, he would concentrate on maintaining that heritage intact as we have received it from our fathers; as a Liberal, he would make his special care the maintenance, and if need be, the completion, of those political and constitutional liberties that we associate with the idea of a freeborn Englishman, and their extension in the shortest practicable time, to all peoples, races and languages with whom we may have to deal; as a Labourite he would face the hardest task of all, that of bringing liberty into line with the requirements of the new age, by employing all necessary means to make every human being equally partaker of the heritage, not only in form, but in deed and spirit.

But these differences of emphasis are not differences of spirit, but rather of temperament and capacity—the same sort of difference that there is between army and navy and air-force, or between members of the same team striving in unison for the same victory. And even so, the more any man can harmonize all three standpoints in his own proper soul, the more complete a man he will be, or—to use the language of the cricket field—the better all-rounder. For the spirit of liberty is not to be confined in closed compartments. A Tory, for instance, will be a good Tory in proportion as he is an advanced Liberal, especially since his has become residuary legatee of the now spiritually defunct Liberal party. And he will be an even better Tory from carrying forward that great tradition of social reform he has inherited from Disraeli, to lengths that even the author of *Sybil* never envisaged. And without labouring the point further, it is easily seen how the best one-party man is likewise the best all-party man.

Granted that, there is no reason for not keeping on the party labels after the war for those who happen to like being labelled, or keeping the parties themselves in being as a convenient means for seeing that all aspects of every common task are equally envisaged and debated. It is the spirit that counts, and if all are united in the service of the same cause, and that cause the cause of liberty, a certain amount of friendly rivalry may act as a mutual stimulus, and engender a more effective co-operation.



But the spirit in which alone the peace, no less than the war, can be won, must, imperatively, be the same one of whole-hearted and single-minded co-operation that we expect from war-mates and team-mates. Whether we realize it or not, we shall be, as we are now, fighting for our lives and more than our lives, under conditions that do not even warrant us in asserting that the odds are in our favour. And who but a lunatic or a Quisling would, under such circumstances, want to tolerate, still less foment and exacerbate, a fight against each other in any shape or form? If we must satisfy our pugnacious instincts, once there are no Germans or Japanese available for the purpose, can we not do so vicariously every Saturday afternoon by roaring ourselves hoarse on our local sports grounds? Or if we must give them a political vent, let it be all together in defending our liberties against the real foe from within, the Fifth Column of the Right and the Sixth Column of the Left, the men of malignant and irreconcilable ill will who are out not to preserve but to annihilate our heritage of free civilization.

Let us then, I do not say get down to the job, for we are that already—but keep on at it till it is finished, which will not be yet awhile, or within any time that we can foresee; and let us keep our energies for that, without any thought of diverting them to the stale and out-of-date conventions of the pre-war faction fight. It is a task not only of life or death urgency, but also of a delicacy and complexity never dreamed of in the past, and one for which we shall want the ideally best managing directorate, quite irrespective of what colour each of its constituent members may happen to sport in his tie or his politics. And let the only contest be one of sacrifice and generosity, and the winner he who has contributed most to advance the common cause.

Sterile indeed is the breath of exhortation! But if the eyes of this indomitable people could once be opened to the real situation that confronts them, most assuredly there would be no need for it. The stayers of 1940 are not likely to be the quitters of 1944, or after; and if it is necessary to fight a second Battle of Britain, longer and harder than the first, before the heritage of freedom that we have received from our ancestors can be put out of mortal peril, once let that necessity be fairly brought home to each of us,

and there is no doubt that, tired as we are, we shall not be found wanting.

But can it be brought home—and in time? On the answer to that not only our own fate, but that of civilization itself, may well depend.

On your answer—yours and mine. For by the answer of each will be determined the fate of all. It is what we make of ourselves that we shall make of the world.

That is a terrifying, but it is also a heartening responsibility. Neither man nor plan can relieve us of any part of it. For no leader, however great, can win us either the war or the peace, without an answering greatness in the souls of us his followers; nor can the most cunningly contrived plan or programme be made to work, failing the requisite strength and cohesion of its human material. So, by an inexorable logic, it all reduces itself to our strength, our greatness, our cohesion—yours and mine.

These have been proved already in the fire of war: a sterner test lies ahead. It is not the Little Man in Berchtesgaden that we have to fear, but the Little Man in our midst and in ourselves; the low type who, because the spirit of freedom is not in him, cannot endure to be free himself or to tolerate it in his neighbours, but who, with the terrible blind strength possessed by the lowest organisms, is yet capable of doing what the Axis and Luftwaffe could not, by striking us with mortal disease in the hour of victory.

Even now his second and final come-back is being prepared. Even now all the malignant and soul-destroying forces that got us down after the last war are mobilizing for the overwhelming assault, that will be timed to catch us exhausted and war-weary. It is most assuredly coming—indeed its first penetrations and probings have already started; and there will be nothing for it but to brace ourselves to fight, and fight out, a second Battle of Britain against even greater odds than the first, and of a kind that offers no precedent of victory.

But there is no help for it; we must quite literally conquer or die. For a return to the pre-war normalcy, or anything like it, *will* be death. This time we have got to purge the Little Man wholly out of our system, with all his shibboleths and slogans and

pettinesses and team loyalties; and to keep him out, until such time as it is safe to say:

“ Now we can all get up from the job, and go home and play.”

Which will not be when the last All Clear sounds, or for quite a long time after.

For our heritage of freedom can be neither enjoyed nor kept, unless we conquer it in ourselves. We know that we have it in ourselves to do so; for that too is our heritage and birthright. Let the need once be brought home to us, and we shall find, as we have always found in the past, a greatness equal to it.

Therefore, in so far as I may presume to make any appeal at all, it is no more than that you should look the facts in the face, and judge for yourself whether or not this need does actually exist.

For what you then decide to do will follow, as surely as day follows night, from what you are—one of the inheritors of freedom.



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